

MARJORIBANKS




By ELVIRTON WRIGHT



Blanche Padgett,
Christmas
1916

S.M.P.



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The girls were seated under a tree as the carriage passed.
Frontispiece *Marjoriebanks*

MARJORIBANKS

A Story for Girls

By ELVIRTON WRIGHT

Author of "Pen's Venture"

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MARJORIBANKS

CHAPTER I.

A BUD OF PROMISE.

TWENTY minutes late.

The young lady read that brief announcement on the bulletin, looked down the track as though there was still some chance of seeing the expected train, then resigned herself to walking restlessly up and down the platform.

Some small boys were playing around the station ; she spoke to them all by name, had a word or two with the station master, and then went around back of the station to see if her pony and phaëton were all right. Dolly shook her head and mane and seemed inclined to wrench the hitching strap in two, in order to reach her mistress.

March Pomeroy patted the pony's head in an absent-minded way and returned to the track. Two ladies sitting in the waiting room watched her pass the window.

"March Pomeroy you call her?" said one.
"What an odd name! Is it a nickname?"

"Not exactly," replied her friend, who was a Wellsburgian proper and knew all about everybody. "She has a queer name; and I, for one, think it is silly to give girls such names. Her mother was a Marjoribanks—or that is how it should be pronounced, for it is spelled that way—but it is called Marchbanks. She named her daughter Marjoribanks, and she has always been called March. If ever a girl has had a queer bringing up, she has had. Some people rave over her, and her mother too; but I'm not so new-fangled. The way I was brought up is good enough for me and for my daughters."

"She is a remarkably fine-looking girl," put in the other.

And as March stood by a wooden pillar on the platform, looking up the track, any one would have confessed the same thing. Her age was about sixteen. Every step, every position, every motion was easy, free, graceful, and suggestive of strength. Her skin showed a clear, warm, healthy tone rarely seen. Her eyes, gazing so eagerly up the track, were beautiful eyes; soft and dark and changeful. Her dark, half-curling hair only

reached to her shoulders, and was combed like a child's, with a bang. A soft, white felt hat was well crowded down on the back of her head. Her tennis suit of white flannel, and tennis shoes, gave her the freedom necessary to a hygienically dressed damsel in these latter days.

There was a train whistle and the station platform became the scene of considerable activity. Around the curve and down the track came the train and stopped at last. There were not very many passengers for Wellsburg.

March scanned the car windows intently. The door of the rear car opened, and almost before the train had stopped a little girl jumped off. She saw March at once, and running up to her without the slightest hesitation, said in a tone piercing in its sweetness and distinctness:—

“Here I be. You the one? Here's my bag — candy in it. Where's my carriage?”

March's face was a study. Surprise, relief, disappointment, satisfaction, amusement, discouragement — it would have been hard to have determined which emotion predominated. There was no reason for waiting there, but she stood looking at the child.

A red-cheeked, round, dark-eyed, dirty little

face ; dark, close-cut hair showing under the wide-brimmed black chip hat, new, but already torn ; a blue flannel sailor suit — a world too big — new, but already dirty, the skirt reaching her shoe tops, and having a festooned effect, as though it had been fastened higher in spots than nature intended.

“Hope you’ll know me next time you see me! Goin’ to stay here all night, hey?” piped up the musical voice.

“Are you Bud?” asked March in a puzzled tone. Her voice was low and beautifully modulated, in striking contrast with the shrill, sweet voice of the child.

“Bud? Course I’m Bud! Who else ’d you s’pose I’d be? This my carriage? Oh, goody, goody, goody! What’s its name? You — here! I’m goin’ to drive!”

She seized the reins from March’s hands and proceeded to drive ; in a minute Dolly was nearly frantic, and except for March’s prompt action would have upset the phaëton by cramping the wheels.

“Ain’t you got the manners — taking them lines from me!” cried the young woman indignantly. “That ain’t no shucks of a horse — drives like a

fool! Ain't you got any better horse than that?"

Through March's mind floated her dreams of an hour before, on her way down to the station: she had seen herself with a little timid girl of eight sitting beside her; a little girl startled at her new surroundings, half afraid of March herself, and wondering at her friendliness; pleased with the novelty of the pony and phaëton, alert to the beauties of the road along which they were driving, and ready to respond with shy smiles to the kind, reassuring words March would use.

"Are you eight years old? You don't look more than six."

"Small of my age—that's all. I know a mighty sight more 'n if I was six, I kin tell you!"

"What is your real name? do you know?"

"Nope; nor I don't want to know. I'm goin' ter have a new name—Lillie or Grace or Clementine. What's your name? Punkin—Pomade?"

"Pomeroy."

"Pomeroy. Well, I'll fergit it again in five minutes. Been told forty times already. Oh, I'm a great kid; I'll tell you that to begin with!"

The look on March's face was one of unmitigated disgust. She would try the scenery on this city savage.

"Look! is n't it beautiful along here? See—those trees are beech trees, and you can hear the water rippling down in that gully. We will see the stream a little further up."

Bud heaved a sigh. "Terrible slow! Ain't seen a store nor a brick nor a billboard, nor a man nor a woman nor a kid since we turned that corner back there! Lord! ain't no life here at all!"

"You must n't say Lord," suggested March.

"Must n't, hey? Well, I'd like to see you stop me! Put that in your crop!"

The girl continued to talk steadily, using the word Lord constantly.

March's face was acquiring a stern, set expression. She looked as though it wouldn't take much to make her throw her comrade headlong out of the phaëton. Who was she, this miserable, little nameless waif from a city slum, with never before a whole garment to her back, to talk in such a dictatorial, impudent way to her—to her—March Pomeroy—who—who always had been deferred to herself? "Yes; and have been

taught and had everything nice, till *I* think *I* own the world myself." And March laughed at the incongruity of her present position and all her imaginings. She recalled her mother's last words that morning as she stood on the broad front steps : —

"Now, don't be discouraged, dear, at the start;" and she had thought then how little her mother guessed how prepared she was for anything. She laughed again, and Bud looked up sharply.

"What you laughing at? laughing at me?"

An impulse to say No was rapidly changed.

"Yes," she said, smiling down to the little face; "I was doing just that — laughing at you."

Could it be that the child looked slightly uncomfortable? If so, good: she could manage her yet.

The road on which they were driving was a well-kept turnpike winding up a wooded slope. To their left was a deep gully, and on the farther side a strip of woods and then farm lands. The trees were in all the grand freshness of early summer; the water babbled musically far down in the gully — a sound that brought to the imagination wet stones, fresh, damp moss, little, clear brown pools, water-sprinkled ferns.

They passed a tollgate and March paid the toll to a little boy, who stared violently at Bud; a footpath back of the tollhouse wound up the hill through an orchard.

"That is our orchard, Bud."

"Orchard? What's an orchard, I'd like to know?"

"A place where apples and peaches and pears grow."

"I don't see no apples nor no peaches nor no pears," said Bud, craning her neck to look.

"They are n't there yet; we have to wait until they grow."

"Grow!" echoed Bud derisively; "that's country ways, is it? Gi' me the city! In the city they're right in store windows when you want 'em, thick as anything. Awful slow out here!"

March turned at the next corner and they soon were in full view of the house — a fine stone and brick structure built originally in the square, colonial style, but with later additions in the way of wings and verandas, which gave a solid picturesqueness. The house stood on the summit of the hill, the grounds sloping away from it on two sides, and extending in a level plateau on the other two sides. The level was given

over to smooth green lawn, a tennis court, archery ground, and croquet ground. Great branching trees stood near the house and vines climbed over the verandas and clung to the walls. The sloping ground was cut up with rather desultory paths, trees, bushes, odd flower-beds, seats, and arbors.

They drove through a stone gateway up the graveled carriage drive to the broad stone steps.

"You don't live here, do you?" exclaimed Bud.

"Why not?" Did she appreciate something of her good fortune at last?

"Why? Cause there ain't a house around it. Why don't you live in a block? You don't stay here *nights*, do you?"

"Yes; certainly."

"Well, I'll just scream murder all night long steady, I'll be so scart."

March gave her a cool look. "There will be no one to hear you, so it won't do you much good."

Was there again a disconcerted expression on the child's face? Good! March's spirits rose, and when her mother came out on the steps she could afford to wave the whip and announce their arrival with unaffected elation.

"Now, Bud, this lady is Mrs. Pomeroy. Shake hands with her."

Bud shook hands obediently enough, but with a sharp measuring glance that March did not fail to notice.

"Measuring mamma, is she? Well, she won't make out much, for I can't do it myself," thought March. And sure enough, Bud did look puzzled.

"Are you tired, dear?" asked Mrs. Pomeroy.

"No; I ain't tired. Here! You, there! hand me my bag; candy in it!" and seizing her bag she opened it in a braggadocio way and extracted a small green and white striped paper sack in which were some sticky lemon drops. "Here," she said, handing the bag to March, "I been savin' 'em for you since I started. I *et* some myself. I did n't know there was two of you. You'll have to divide with her," pointing one tiny finger at Mrs. Pomeroy.

March's heart suddenly misgave her. All the warm feelings she had conceived for the little waif before seeing her came back to her with a rush.

"Thanks, dear," she said gratefully. "That was ever so kind of you. We'll have a party and all eat them."

"When? Now?" was the prompt reply.

"After you have been washed."

"Me washed! I ain't goin' to be washed!"

"Yes, you are. You are dirty."

"Ain't dirty!"

"You are too dirty to get into your nice, new, clean clothes."

That altered the complexion of affairs.

"Have I got some new clothes? Oh, goody, goody! Come on and show me! I'll try 'em all on!"

March took her up to the little room she had taken such pains to prepare for her, next to her own.

The floor was covered with figured matting and bright rugs. The furniture was a child's set. Some pretty curtains were at the windows. A picture of Christ blessing little children, and some dog pictures, were on the walls. On the little table were two picture-books; a little brush and comb box and pincushion were on the bureau. Pillow shams adorned the tiny bed; and a much blinder, more adamantine child than Bud would have been in raptures over the dainty prettiness of that room.

"Oh, *ain't* it lovely! Is it mine? Goody,

goody, goody! Will I have my own servant? Where's them clothes?"

Have her own servant indeed! March wanted to shake the conceited little thing.

Bud pulled out the bureau drawers, tossed over all the things March had so carefully laid away, discovered two little white gamps, and began to squeal with delight.

"Goody, goody! always wanted one of them! I'll put 'em smack on!"

Out came a print dress, a gingham, a white dress, a black lawn, white aprons and gingham aprons, stockings, slippers, underclothes.

"Oh, goody, goody! I'm the richest girl on earth!"

The things were all tumbled out on the floor.

"That is no way to treat clothes," said March. "Pick them all up and come into the bathroom."

March chose out a gingham dress and a white apron and waited; but in the end she had to put the things back herself, for Bud made no attempt to do it.

Once in the bathroom, Bud could hardly be persuaded to allow herself to be washed.

"I *won't* be washed, I tell you!"

"See here," said March, leaning back in a chair

and eying the bare-armed little girl as she stood in her petticoat, flashing defiance from her dark eyes ; “ now this is fair : I say you are dirty ; you say you are n’t. To prove which is right, let me wash you. If the water is clean when I am through with you, you need never wash again. If it is dirty, you must wash when I tell you.”

Quick as a flash the bits of clothes dropped off, and Bud was in the tub. She sputtered and fussed some under March’s rather spasmodic and gingerly movements, but on the whole evinced considerable placidity. The water began to assume a very dingy complexion ; it no longer allowed a fair view of the shining porcelain bottom of the tub.

“ Look how dirty the water is ! ”

“ Gosh ! I ’m goin’ to wash twict a day all my life ! ” announced Bud. “ Ain’t I a dirty girl ! ”

She was wiped and put into all manner of little clean clothes, last of all the new dress and apron, which were full large. But she looked quite pretty, her cheeks were so red and her eyes were so bright.

March meditated to herself : “ You never can believe all you read — ‘ pale-faced city children ’ and all that. Her cheeks are as red as can be.

And to think of the things I've read about the wild joy of city children on getting out to grass and flowers! She won't care anything about them, I'm convinced. But, then, she must be an exception."

CHAPTER II.

THE HOW AND WHY.

THAT night, when March knew that her youthful charge was sound asleep in her small bed, the relaxation of tension was so felt that she went quietly downstairs to the veranda, where her mother was sitting, and subsiding into a hammock she swung herself by the hammock cord and said never a word. The sense of peace was too strong and too precious to be broken rudely by speech.

Her mother sat in a rocking-chair, her dress flecked by moonlight and the wavering shadows of the grape leaves, thinking a thousand things she would not say.

Was this little stray to be too much of a burden for March? Any one could see that she would be a hard child to manage.

She had feared that her daughter was too much alone, was growing too self-centered, was too intolerant of ordinary people and ordinary things, too indifferent towards those not her equals in intellectual grasp, and unfortunately, so her mother

thought, she knew few who were her equals. The girl's mind was surprisingly keen and accurate.

Mrs. Pomeroy, well aware of her own masterful individuality, had dreaded lest she should warp her daughter; should force her to be what she wanted or thought it right for her daughter to be, rather than what it was her nature to be. So careful had she been in this regard that it was a matter of comment among her friends.

"She exercises no control whatever over March. It is absurd to let a girl of that age be her own mistress!"

"I should never do so by my daughters!"

It was a difficult feat that Mrs. Pomeroy had accomplished in this respect. Every strong nature longs to dominate. The kinder and sweeter the nature the more inflexible is this desire in certain lines. The conviction that one knows the best renders one relentless to the one best beloved.

But though March certainly had all the independence and originality that could possibly have been desired, her mother knew that those qualities were not the only ones necessary, or even perhaps most desirable for the noblest womanhood. Graciousness, thoughtfulness for others,

a broad charity, patience with one's humankind, ready sympathy — youth does not often possess these qualities. They come with the years that bring experience in sorrow. The years would bring these things to March. But was it necessary to wait? Mrs. Pomeroy had done a deal of thinking on this subject.

Most girls from babyhood are interested in children younger than themselves. A child of five loves to protect the little one of three. Their plays are largely tinged by "mother games" and taking care of smaller children. All young hearts, before they are spoiled by a society purely in the interests of selfish enjoyment, or biased by the indifference of the older ones about them, instinctively enjoy doing something for others less well off than themselves. Children like to give. It may be a crude love of patronizing; it may be kindness; it may be both: but, whatever it is, it exists.

Mrs. Pomeroy, always preferring to work on existing traits, hoped that what she most longed for in her daughter might be evolved by means of these characteristics. But March herself must be the prime mover.

Mysterious papers began to arrive — little pam-

phlets about Dr. Barnardo's work in London, little sketches of some of the rescued children at Ilford, reports of orphan asylums.

At first March did not seem to take much interest in these things. She was busy in her workshop. She was horseback riding or driving. She was reading poetry and "articles" and all manner of things that made her keener and brighter every day.

Mrs. Pomeroy supplemented the literature with stories skillfully told. Few could equal Mrs. Pomeroy as a talker. It seemed to have no effect; March was temporarily interested, but she apparently did not perceive any relation between these matters and Marjoribanks Pomeroy.

Mrs. Pomeroy had concluded to talk about it all in detail with her daughter, when one evening March suddenly began:—

"Mamma, I want to talk. I have been thinking about it for weeks and weeks. If there really are destitute children—little girls—who have no chance, except chances for evil, why could n't I take a little girl? I know, mamma," she said hastily, "that it will seem just as though I say I, and mean you; that I don't take interest in sewing and fussing and all sorts of troubles a child would

make ; that I just like to read and amuse myself ; but, really, if I tried, I know I could take the trouble myself. Of course it would be a horrible bother for you. She would have to be in the house and make a noise and act ugly, and be sick maybe, and all that ; but I should want to do the work and money part myself, buy her clothes and playthings, and all, out of my allowance. I would just dote on trying it, mamma. Do you think it is a crazy notion ? Are you laughing at it ? ”

“ No, dear,” said her mother slowly. Now that it really had turned out as she hoped, she must be very cautious ; this must not be a thing of impulse. It might be a very serious matter in the end. “ I should have to be certain you know what it means, and I too. I can’t believe that you know the care and trouble a child is, and the strain and worry on one’s mind.”

“ Oh, I should n’t be bothered by strain and worry on my mind, you know,” was the laughing reply. “ I don’t see how such things can be very bad : not like having dinner so late you get terribly hungry, or breaking your collar bone, or things of that kind. Of course she might be a dreadful little thing, but she would learn and I would try to be good to her. And I have thought about it.

This is n't the first time it has entered my head, you know. My allowance would do splendidly if you would let me make over my old clothes for her."

"But you never have sewed and you don't like it."

"Oh, I know, but of course I can; and I would too, if I saw any sense in it; and there would be sense if it helped me have a little girl to make comfortable and happy."

A great many talks followed, and when March had been able to convince her mother that she knew what she was about, and that she meant to take the whole charge of the infant, Mrs. Pomeroy took steps to find a little girl.

March had her own ideas about that too. "I don't want a child from an orphan asylum," she said. "If a child is in an orphan asylum, attention has been called to its woes, and some one will come to the front and the child will have a chance. I want a child that has n't any chance, and a healthy child too."

Mrs. Pomeroy wrote to various Children's Aid Societies, and from one received an answer that interested them both. The letter spoke of a little girl who had recently come to their notice,

though nothing had been done about the case. If they were sure of a home for her, they would take steps to rescue her from her awful position. She was with a woman, not her mother, who was a notably bad character. She was not ill-treated, but her moral surroundings were of the greatest danger. She was eight years old, bright, healthy, and reasonably good looking.

That was the child March decided on at once. The necessary money was sent, and March began to sew. She sewed so vigorously that her mother was inclined to interfere. Some of the first-made garments were rather curiously cut and not of the neatest finish, but the later-constructed articles would have been a credit to any one.

And now the child had been with her nine hours and was sound asleep. "Mamma," said March solemnly, at last breaking the silence, "that child is actually asleep in her bed!"

Mrs. Pomeroy said nothing.

"Now, mamma, what do you think of her?"

"She seems very bright," was the evasive answer.

"Is n't she?" March was pleased. "She is as bright as she can be, but she will worry you to death. I feel real wicked about it."

"March, dear," said her mother promptly, "I don't wish you to entertain any notion of that kind. For my part I am unreservedly glad to have the little thing here. I shall worry, doubtless, for fear it is too much for you, and shall be afraid I did wrong to encourage you in it. I shall not feel disturbed by the child herself."

"What shall I do with her? She's awful, she's so conceited — if that is the word I want — and so domineering and assertive, and has n't the first idea of reverence or respect. What shall I do?"

"I am glad you have spoken about it, March, for I want to explain something. From my having brought you up from babyhood, and because I have been in the habit of constantly teaching and advising you, I know very well I shall feel as though I ought to tell you a great many things about managing this child. If I were to do as I shall undoubtedly feel like doing, I should be suggesting something every hour in the day. I do not mean to do this. You must feel your own way. You must decide your own course with this child. You know you will have my keenest sympathy, and I shall want to know all you do and think; but I have resolved, positively and

absolutely, that I shall not interfere or put forward my opinions."

"But suppose I ruin her!"

"You won't. You may do wrong things, as every one does—as I have with you—as every mother does; but you are as sensible as many women grown; and whatever you do, her life here will be a marvelous improvement on anything she has experienced before."

"I just know I shall be terribly cross. She has made me furious already."

"Do as you think best. Whatever plan you form now you will probably change on further acquaintance."

They were silent a long time again.

"I've just been thinking," began March again, "how dreadfully callous I've been; it honestly never dawned upon me that I have had more than just my bare rights. There! you won't know what I mean. I knew I was wonderfully fortunate, and all that, but it seemed as though my opportunities belonged to me naturally, and I can't imagine you could ever have planned and fussed over me as I have over Bud this one day."

She laughed and Mrs. Pomeroy laughed heartily.

"I can tell you what, mamma, you shall find me

twice as appreciative and reasonable and thoughtful for you for having this imp here," March continued gravely. "You can laugh just as much as you please ; I've been horrid."

"You have been the greatest treasure a woman ever had," said her mother indignantly. "What are you going to call your specimen?"

"'Punkin,' I guess ; that's what she called me. What do you think — some steady name?"

"Have n't you thought of anything?"

"Yes ; I thought Elizabeth was a good solid name and we could call her Bess, — that is nearer like Bud, — Bessie Pomeroy. You would never guess that, bright as she is, she does n't know one thing ; she does n't know a single letter, nor how to count up to five, nor the days of the week — she doesn't know anything!"

CHAPTER III.

METHODS NOT FOUND IN BOOKS.

NOW, Bess, make your bed neatly, and pick up all these things. I showed you how yesterday morning. You may do it yourself this morning while I watch you."

March stood in Bessie's room, waving her hand in a comprehensive way toward the bedclothes airing in the windows, the open bureau drawers, the disorderly little washstand, the towel on the floor.

Bess turned around squarely, her closely cropped, little dark head the personification of aggressiveness, her hands on her hips, her feet apart, and developed her opinions in an assertive, but very sweet, voice.

"Ain't you got the gall! Who do you take me fer, anyway? Do you think *I'm* goin' to work? Where's your servants? I ain't no servant, and the quicker you git that into your cokynut the better."

March wanted to shake her, and stood eying her in a very impressive way, as she thought;

but Bess simply cocked her head on one side and returned the glance with interest.

March was angry ; her eyes flashed. "Come with me," she said ; and, as the child did not move, she grasped the small arm, saying, "Well, then, I'll make you, if you prefer it that way !"

Without another word she led her out into the hall, up the broad stairs to the top of the house, into a small, unfinished room, with the beams in the sloping roof in full sight. "Now, young woman," said March grimly, "I shall put a cot bed up here, and a tin basin on a chair for you to wash in, and here you shall stay until you are ready to take proper care of your own room, as a lady should. If you don't wish to take care of your room, you need n't have it."

March could scarcely believe what followed.

"Oh, I'll take care of my room," — the voice was so sweet and coaxing and babyish ! — "and I'll make it look dust as nice as I can." There was a bright smile on the little face.

"Upon my honor," thought March, "if this is n't easy, nothing ever was ! When I was a child I would have slept here a year rather than have given in, if I had started to be bad."

"All right. I think you are very sensible ; but

I want you to understand plainly that I don't want ever to hear any more talk about it. You must fix it the best it can be fixed, and just the way I tell you, or up here you shall come."

The room was arranged that morning in a most thorough manner; some things commanded by the relentless March had to be done over three or four times, but not a cloud crossed Bessie's face; she was pleasantness itself.

"I never dreamed of taking care of my room so well as this at her age," thought March; and she remembered what an endless task it seemed to her to do it at all, and how disgusted she had been with her mother not longer than a year before, because she refused to have the servants do it.

"She is a thousand times a better child than I ever was," meditated March. "I should not have smiled for a week if any one had spoken to me as I spoke to her."

"Now you can go outdoors to play."

"Where 'll I play?"

"Outside, around the house."

"Well, I don't like it. I like to play on a nice brick walk. Who 'll I play with?"

"Play with yourself."

"What do you take me fer? Ain't there no children around here? Well, I don't like no such place — no children!"

"You can take your doll."

"I don't care nothin' fer dolls; they can't talk nor walk!"

"Go out and play on the grass."

"Oh, go to grass yourself, if you're so brash about it!"

March's temper was rising again. She thought of fifty things to do to annihilate this scoffer, but she merely said shortly: —

"I have n't time to talk about it. If you don't want to go out, stay in."

As she went out she perceived with some satisfaction a very blank look on the little red-cheeked face. She went to her workshop and turned the key in the door. She sat down in the old easy-chair, feeling as though she had been up already some twelve hours, working hard all the time.

"I'll never let her in here, anyway."

That wonderful workshop! Opposite her the glass double doors stood wide open, letting in the delicious morning air. The doors opened out on a wide veranda where Baltimore belles and yellow honeysuckle climbed, shedding their fra-

grance. She could look through the place kept open for the view, down the sloping orchard, and then away off over miles and miles of woods and farmlands — a beautiful country.

Inside, the room was well worth examination. Over in a bay window stood a table, and on it a something wrapped in cloths that looked a little like a human figure. Some clay models, finished, stood in conspicuous places. Along one side of the wall was a workbench, with a tool cabinet over it, and various kinds of woods under it; a turning lathe was near by. A well-stocked, though somewhat disorderly, bookcase invited inspection, and near it was a flat-topped office desk, covered with papers, pens, bristol board, and different varieties of ink bottles and glue bottles. Opposite the entrance door was a great wide fireplace, though now its black vacuum was concealed by a shield of beaten brass. There was an easel in one corner and a paint box, several palettes and paint rags. On the walls were hung quantities of sketches, nearly all of figures done in black and white paint, or in charcoal. The floor was bare and polished. There was only one rug in the room, a handsome fur one, in front of a divan covered with pillows. Beside the divan hung a mandolin.

"She would make havoc in here," thought March.

No wonder March liked to stay home and "do things," her girl friends used to say, somewhat discontentedly. "Think of all the things she can do, and of that workshop of hers! It's all very well to say that such things are n't for girls, and that it is silly for a girl to have a workbench; but she can make wonderful things, and gets lots of fun out of it."

Her mother usually sat out on the veranda reading or sewing, or perhaps writing, when March was in her workshop. This morning March knew that her mother was in the library, which was the adjoining room, and also opened out on the veranda. She hoped that she would come out.

Her mother did not come; but there was a clattering down the hall, a childish voice calling, "Where is she anyway? Must be in here!" Then there was a banging at the door and rattling of the knob. "Let me in, I say! I want to come in! Locked! Well, I know she's in there. I'll get in some other way."

March could hear her go to the library, burst in, call out in a shrill voice: "Halloo! you here?"

Where's that girl? I want her." Then there was a dash out on to the veranda, and in a minute Bess was inside the sacred precincts of the workshop.

"Why did n't you let me in? Why did n't you answer me? You've got healthy manners, I must say! What's this? Golly! And this? Oh, I'll stay in here!"

"You not only can't stay in here," said March, finding her voice at last, "but you can't come in here. Put that thing down at once."

"Put that thing down at once," mockingly. "Get me out if you can! I'll yell murder."

"It won't do any good. There's no one to hear you," said March, remembering her success with that remark on a previous occasion.

"Oh, you'll lick me, will you?"

"No; I won't 'lick' you. You can do what you please, but I shall not whip you."

Bess seemed far more perplexed than relieved at that statement.

"Now go to that door, turn the key, and go out."

"Well, I never! I ain't goin' to do no such a thing."

"Well, I'll put you out then!"

The child resisted strongly, but March paid very little attention to that fact. She pushed her out in the hall and locked the door. Then came a yell of rage and a volley of hard names.

"Mamma can't write a word," thought March, rising. "This will never do in the world. A constant struggle will wear mamma out. I'll just have to give up every minute to her until she is settled. Good-by, workshop."

In the hall Bess was waiting for the result of her exploit. She was all ready for further excitement, and rejoicing in the prospect. March took her by the arm.

"Come on."

She led her to her room, took off her apron and dress, put on her a large piece of striped ticking in which she cut holes for the child's arms, and then fastened it up the back with safety-pins.

"You don't act like a lady, now that you have the chance to be one, so you can be and look like a drudge. How do you like it?" and she wheeled her in front of the looking-glass. "How Mary Ann and Molly will laugh at you!"

The child bit her lips and said never a word.

"Now come with me. No hesitation!" Bess followed promptly, head down.

March led her to the kitchen. Mary Ann and Molly both burst out in a loud laugh when they saw the queer little striped-ticking figure.

"Take this pail," said March.

Bess picked it up.

"Turn that faucet and half fill it."

That was promptly done.

"Dip up a gourdful of soft soap and put in it. All right. Here is a scrubbing brush. Now I want you to scrub these stone steps out here by the back door, and every stone out to the pump. I'll watch you and see that you do it properly."

March felt a strong inclination to make Molly oversee the job, it seemed so tedious to sit there and watch that useless scrubbing. "It's my business; I'll do it myself," she decided resolutely. However she bethought herself of her sketch-book and pencil, and was soon vastly interested in sketching the little scrubber. The tight ticking gave the lines of the body finely.

"What you doin'?" demanded Bess finally.

"Making pictures of the little girl that is n't smart enough to know a good thing when she sees it. If you were pleasant and tried to act right, I should try to make you very happy. But I shall not feel inclined to take much pains for an infant

of your stamp." March threw as much indifferent superiority into her voice as she was able. She made Bess go over and over her scrubbing, wondering constantly when the child's patience would give out. It was almost dinner time when Bess said in an exasperated tone, "Well, I can tell you what, I'm tired!"

"Oh, that is of no consequence," was the calm reply. "You need not have scrubbed at all if you had behaved yourself. I meant you to get tired. I will show you how to put your things up, and as it is so near dinner time you may wash your face and hands out there at the pump. I can't allow you to eat at the table with us. I find I have been mistaken in you. You do not wish to be a lady, and cannot be with ladies. Mary Ann and Molly will not allow you to eat with them, but they will clear a place for you at their table after they are through, and you can eat there."

Mrs. Pomeroy from the veranda had seen the curious little scrubber.

"What good sense March has!" she thought proudly. "I never dreamed the child could be such a charge. Well, March will win in the end if any one can, I think. I did n't know the child could be so stern."

March was as tired by dinner time as though she had— She could n't think what other thing she could have done to have made her so tired as she was.

“Mamma, mamma, do talk to me!” she said, sitting on a footstool and putting her head on her mother's lap. “I just don't seem to have the least little bit of patience. Ought I to be so hard on her? You ought to see the way she worked, and never complained once! I never could have been so good. I never heard of such a good child. And how I talked to her! It would have killed me. And I planned, you know, that I would be so good to her, and that she would love me. How can she now? But I'm not going to bother you. Let's eat. I'm starving hungry.”

Some time after dinner March was in her own room and heard a slight noise in Bessie's. She went in. There was Bessie arrayed in a clean dress and white apron, standing before the looking-glass, putting the finishing touches to her shorn locks.

“I must n't drop this in the middle,” thought March resolutely; then aloud: “Who told you you could put on a dress and apron?”

No answer.

"Take those things right off. I have not forgotten your behavior this morning. Impudent little girls shall not wear nice clothes. You shall put on your ticking, which suits your behavior, and scrub some more."

The clothes, which had been very neatly put on, were silently taken off.

The scrubbing went on all the afternoon, while March sat and watched. She could see the child grow paler, could see the little legs tremble when she staggered up the walk with the pail after clean water.

"This is cruelty," thought March, who had been in the habit since early childhood of thinking to herself as though she were two individuals. "This is tyranny; because I can *make* that little thing do as I say I revel in it. Do I revel in it? Yes, I do; I think it is a great thing to see her struggle to do as I tell her. I love to have her obey. I sha'n't give up now anyway."

Bess was now scrubbing with her back to March and the brush moved very slowly.

March walked around where she could see her. Bess was striving to keep from crying, though the tears would run down the little nose and drop off with a tiny splash on the wet stones.

“You’re about through with this now, and if you think you can mind when I speak to you, and keep back your impudence, I won’t give you any more scrubbing to do to-night.”

No answer.

“If you will do as I say, you may take the pail to the house and go to your room.”

Bess dragged the pail up to the house. March thought she had never seen anything so forlorn as that little mite of a girl in her ticking strait-jacket, moving wearily up to the house. She gained a faint conception of the wonderful thing it had seemed to the child to find herself an object of attention; to have new clothes, and to be put on a train and travel, to be received kindly and talked to, and to be overwhelmed with new things. To her it must have seemed that she was suddenly a remarkable person; perhaps that these things were her rights, gained by her quickness and impudence, the only qualities that heretofore had won her laughing admiration and attention. And now to be so astonished by a change in affairs!

March followed her to her room.

“Shall I take off this?” murmured the tired little voice.

"Yes."

"Shall I put on a dress?"

March sat in a rocking-chair. "Come here to me," she said.

The child came at once, though shrinking a little. March took her in her arms.

"My poor tired little baby! O Bess, won't you be good? won't you try to act like a kind, loving, dear little girl? I love you so, love you, love you, darling! You are my little girl, and I want to be good to you, and if you act bad and keep me punishing you, we can't be happy at all. There! there! don't cry! never mind, dear."

"Ain't cryin'," sobbed Bess.

"Now I'll give you a bath, and dress you up nicely, and you see how nice and sweet you can be to-night."

"This'll learn me a lesson, won't it?" said Bess with some animation, as the new dress scheme penetrated her brain.

And all that evening, as long as she was allowed to sit up, she talked in a very sweet quiet little voice, about the moon and the stars and the flowers, until March felt almost discouraged for fear the child was going to be one of those horrible goody-goody children.

"I never saw so good a child in my life!" said March in a tone of deep conviction to her mother. "Just think of all the work she did and never complained once. I should never have gotten over it if I had been in her place."

CHAPTER IV.

MY WARD JOHN.

THEY will be here next Thursday."

"Who'll be here next Thursday?" piped up Bess as quick as a flash.

"Now Bess, none of that," from March.

"Oh, I forgot!" was the reply in a subdued tone.

The Pomeroy's were at luncheon, and Mrs. Pomeroy had been reading a letter just brought up from the post office. The letter was from her brother-in-law, Chester Pomeroy.

"He will bring John with him," she said, reading further.

"John who?" struck in Bess.

March shook her head warningly.

"Forgot myself again!" murmured the child.

"You never saw John, did you, March?"

"No; I'm sure not."

"Your uncle says he wants to bring him here to meet us."

"Whose uncle? my uncle?" The shrill little voice seemed all-pervasive.

"Now take your plate and go down to the kitchen to eat," said March. "If you can't eat with us without interrupting every time we speak, you will have to eat by yourself." Bess took her plate and started for the kitchen.

"That'll learn me a lesson, won't it?" she said pleasantly.

"Teach me a lesson."

"Teach."

"Say it all."

"I've forgotten what it was now."

"Well—go on. Don't say any more."

"What is his last name, mamma—John what?"

"John Holland. You know your uncle Chester was appointed his guardian some six or seven years ago. He is about your age, I think. He is quite an heir. He is a very lively boy, I imagine, and your uncle Chester wants to talk him over and make some plans for him. The boy is seriously opposed to studying—does n't want to go to college—and I know Chester is worried about him."

"Well, it will be lots of fun to have him come, if he is n't a stick. We can ride horseback and have a great time. Is uncle Chester any like papa?"

"Not at all. If you only could remember your father, dear! I used to think that was too hard to bear, that you should not be able to remember your father."

The coming of visitors in the near future made quite a stir in the Pomeroy household. Mary Ann and Molly did great things in scouring and cleaning; Albert took that opportunity to put the stables and barn in better shape; Mrs Pomeroy busied herself in making the guests' rooms look most cheerful and homelike; March touched up her workshop and overhauled her infant's wardrobe; but no one was quite so excited as Bess. She had resigned herself very contentedly to the stagnation of country life and no longer yearned for a brick sidewalk. She had a playhouse in an apple tree, in which a most thorough house-cleaning was carried on daily previous to the arrival of the guests. She practiced up in tennis and croquet, March having been far more successful in teaching her those games than in teaching her to read. She scrubbed all the woodwork in her room and swept it and dusted it until even March had no criticisms to offer. She became more particular about her daily bath and struggled in anticipation of reminders to keep her elbows off

the dinner table and her knife out of her mouth.

"Oh, do you suppose they 'll like me? Will I have to go to bed at eight o'clock just the same? Will they be glad to see me? Do they know about me? Will I wear my tucked gimp or my embroidered gimp! Will I wear my white dress all the time?"

"Oh, you conceited little thing!" cried March, her scanty patience exhausted at length. "I'll put you back into your ticking if you don't stop acting so. They don't know anything about you, and they don't care anything about you. You are simply a no-account little child, and if you are quiet and polite and careful, as other children are, they will say you are a nice little girl; and if you don't, they won't."

"I must remember to be pretty quiet, must n't I?" was the unabashed answer.

"Yes; and after all you are a very good little girl," replied March, much mollified. She used to say to her mother that when Bess joined right in with her and agreed with what she said, there did not seem to be anything further to be done.

The expected Thursday came at last. Albert drove down to the station, and when the return-

ing carriage wheels were heard Mrs. Pomeroy, March, and Bess went out on the front porch to receive their guests.

Mrs. Pomeroy looked with fond pride at March. Was there ever such a beautiful girl — a girl so striking, so attractive, so original — such a healthy, sound, fresh, lovable girl? She indeed looked picturesque standing there on that vine-covered porch. March in the meanwhile gazed with a certain pride at her protégée. Proper food, constant bathing and rubbing, clean clothes, and sufficient sleep had much improved Bessie's appearance, and her face had lost a little of its boldness and impudence; though March found that expression all too ready to return on the slightest excuse.

The carriage drove up. Mr. Pomeroy waved his hat.

"Now, Bess, stay right here by me;" but it was no use; the little white-robed figure dashed down the steps, seized Mr. Pomeroy frantically by the hand, while a sweet, piercing voice squealed out:—

"Ah, there, my size! I'm Bessie Pomeroy! Is that John? Halloo, John! Halloo, pardner! Take the horse right to the stable, Albert! Aunt

Pomeroy, had I better speak to Molly about — you know what?”

She was near enough for March to whisper, “Don’t say one word more or to bed you’ll go straight after supper,” while Mr. Pomeroy greeted his sister-in-law. John was standing by his guardian waiting to be introduced and laughing at Bess. March held out her hand.

“You are John, are n’t you? I’m so glad you are here at last! We have all planned and planned about your coming since uncle Chester wrote. Mamma, this is John.” “And is n’t he the handsomest boy you ever saw?” she felt like adding, but contented herself with looking in frank admiration at the uncovered, half-curling fair hair — hair with deep rich golden tints in its shades and with gleams like sunshine in its high lights; at the laughing, long-lashed, gray-blue eyes; at the beautiful mouth and chin; the squared-back shoulders and easy, graceful carriage.

“So this is John,” said Mrs. Pomeroy. “John, dear, I shall welcome you for my brother’s sake, but I shall love you for your own.”

The boy’s face flushed. He had n’t expected that, and he wondered if there were any other lady in the world half so beautiful as this one.

He had objected somewhat to making this visit with his guardian ; he thought it would be terribly poky, moored up in a house out in the country, and not a fellow around probably, "and the girl, you know, Uncle Chester, will just be practicing exercises and crocheting thread lace, with the spool dropping every minute for me to pick up, and lying down every afternoon. Jove! you'd better not take *me!*"

And Mr. Pomeroy had shouted with laughter, though John did not know why until he saw March standing on the porch.

"Great Scott! did n't I miss it, though! If she's half as jolly as she looks, we'll get along first-class. She's strong, bet my head on it — Tennis and archery, sure's I live. Grand place! What monstrous trees!"

That evening, after Bess had very amiably gone to bed at the first suggestion of bedtime from March, Mr. Pomeroy and John both began at the same time: "Who is that little girl?"

And Bessie's history, so far as known, and March's struggles with her had to be detailed in full. And the fervor with which March would assure them all that Bess was the best child she

ever heard of, and just as good as she could be, invariably raised a laugh.

"Well, she is just as bright as she can be," said John.

"About some things," was the rather melancholy answer; "and then again she is just as stupid as anybody could be. You can't teach her a thing unless it is something to sing. I tried to teach her the name of one of the Sunday-school lessons—just these few words: "Jesus and Zacchæus the Publican." I had a picture of it; and told her the story over and over again, and had her say it word by word after me and with me. I worked a whole Sunday afternoon on it, and she could n't say it then. She did not use her mind at all. I could n't make any impression on her. The only evidence of thought she gave the whole time was once when she said 'Jesus and Zacchæus the Democrat.'"

"Did you have to give it up?"

"Oh, no; I did n't give it up. I kept at it until she could say it; but I had to put on her ticking and make her scrub first. She learned it pretty quick then."

John was anxious to look around, and March led him off in the moonlight.

"How could you let March go into a thing like that?" asked Mr. Pomeroy. "I should think it would make an old woman of her. Let her stay young. To have the charge of a child at her age would be a thing very much to be deprecated if it really were a necessity, and it does n't seem in keeping with your good sense to allow it. I suppose you have reasons by the yard and will talk me over, but I shall not like it."

"It does n't seem to hurt March any, and so far it has certainly been a great benefit. She has n't retired into herself so much; it has aroused real human interests in her, very noticeably. She is becoming more patient, less easily disturbed by little things, more able to see the joke in things that might annoy. And really, in youth, in a strong, happy, cared-for youth, one can throw off troubles that would overwhelm one later. March can contend with Bess far better than I could. I should be depressed and worried by it, contrary to my better judgment; to March it is only a healthful excitement."

"I should think it would make her dictatorial and dogmatic," said Mr. Pomeroy, resolved to say something.

"That might be a trouble with some children,

but Bess has happily been an object lesson — a warning against such traits. March has been particularly careful on those very points since Bess has been here. I can see it myself.”

“Well, with all your odd and pronounced ideas about bringing up children, you can’t believe it is a good thing for a little girl to be relegated to the tender mercies of an inexperienced child like March !”

Mr. Pomeroy spoke triumphantly ; he was sure he had worsted the enemy in her own camp.

“I certainly should not advocate it in the case of a child who could have anything better. But anything March could do would be immeasurably in advance of anything the child would have had if left alone. It certainly does seem a great pity that there should be neglected, homeless little girls in our cities, and that there should be well-meaning, kindly tempered young girls growing up in happy homes, and that these two classes should not be brought more together. Many a father and mother, worrying over a young daughter’s frivolity and foolishness, could help their daughter to a sense of responsibility in life and to a happy future, by encouraging her to fill the gap between childhood and womanhood by caring for some

homeless little one. I believe it. Immense as would be the benefit to the little waifs, the advantage to the growing girls, as society is now, would outweigh it in the minds of conscientious parents."

"Well," said Mr. Pomeroy, finding enjoyment in Mrs. Pomeroy's energy, "after all I suppose you are the one that really engineers this thing. March is only a figurehead!"

"No, I am not. March does it **all**."

CHAPTER V.

A GIRL'S WORKSHOP.

I MUST show you my workshop the first thing this morning, John," said March at the breakfast table.

"Me too! Can I go too?"

Bessie's remark fell on such an unresponsive audience that she subsided without pressing the question.

"A workshop, March?"

"That must be where March does her crocheting, John," said Mr. Pomeroy solemnly, while John looked terribly apprehensive.

"Yes, a workshop; I am very proud of it. Perhaps it will strike your fancy."

"No guns in it, are there?"

"A rifle — Remington action; very good one too."

March was so evidently unconscious that John had asked the question expecting an answer in the negative that he felt a little nonplused.

"What else is there in it?"

"Oh, wait until you see it. It is a great place."

"Well, I should say this was a great place!" he said half an hour later standing inside the workshop and looking around in astonishment. "A real workbench, a turning lathe — do you use the tools? If this is n't a jolly go! I never had such a set-up in my life! What are those things — clay? Do you model? — and paint? Jove! and you're only sixteen! Well, I'm thankful I'm only fifteen; it will give me a little time to catch up! A set of wood-carving tools! You made those shelves? carved those panels? And brass work! Well, March, let me sit down here to recover!" — leaning back among the pillows of the divan — "and you sit there and let me look at you! No; I can't look at you either. Upon my word that is a good sketch — those figures! Now, that's more my style. Never expected to have such luck in my life!"

"Do you like to draw?" questioned March eagerly.

"Like it? I guess I do; only I rage so because I can't do anything — always fooling with a pencil. I make funny things mostly — horrid pictures of people. You would think that was awful, would n't you? Yes; now, March, I'll tell you this minute," confidentially and leaning for-

ward. "I want to go to the Cooper or somewhere. But you know my guardian, uncle Chester, wants me to go to college. But I am not going; and then I know he would be positive I would fool all my time away in New York — and I don't know but I would," with a frank laugh. "But now maybe you can help me out with him. What a view! Halloo, March, what a queer flower this is out here! What kind of a rose do you call this?"

March went to the veranda doors and, looking where John was pointing, she saw a grinning, red-cheeked, crop-headed infant among the honeysuckles.

"Bess!" said March reproachfully. "You know that is n't minding."

"Oh, ain't it! Well, I never should have suspected it! You did n't say not to climb this post; and I ain't even on your veranda!"

"You climb down and go to your playhouse, and we will come out and see it soon."

There was a vigorous shaking of the vines, then a rattletyclap on the stones below, and an exclamation:—

"Stones, what do you take me fer — bumping up and hitting me? Quit bleeding!"

"She must have hurt herself," said John, anxiously looking down. "Won't she cry?"

"No, indeed. She always laughs when she hurts herself. She says she does n't care."

They went back inside the workshop and John had free leave to look at anything he chose. The tools had to be gone over, the edges commented on, and some of them tried; the gun had to be taken down.

"Can we shoot with it?"

"Yes; we will go down the hill and shoot at the top of the spring house. It is on a level with the place on the hill at the right range."

"The only thing you have n't got, March, is a gymnasium."

March laughed.

"We have a pretty good set over in the barn. Bess is becoming quite a little acrobat. She is so strong, and she can work off lots of impudence in the gymnasium. I like to go out there and work a while, then take a bath, and then sit down and read. That is comfort for you!"

While the two young people were occupying themselves in the workshop, Mr. Pomeroy was confiding his worries to his sister-in-law as they took a morning walk about the grounds.

"You are the most sensible woman on the face of the earth, and I simply had to come to you for help; that boy is certainly going to be ruined!"

"Ruined, Chester! What do you mean? I never saw such a fine, frank, honest face!"

"Oh, yes; I know all about that! Whenever I look at him, as I do very often, I have a faith in him that is outside of and beyond all reason. I feel positive that such a face — such a boy — never could come to anything but the highest. But something must be done and that quickly. He has too much money. He has too much attention paid him; he is too precocious. Oh, everything is wrong, wrong, wrong; and he is going to the dogs!"

Mrs. Pomeroy did not feel so alarmed as her brother expected her to be, and she waited for him to go on.

"The trouble lies just here," he continued: "there is nothing to occupy him. He hates study and feels no zeal for scholarship. So that is counted out; and yet there will be some ten years before he will have any sense. He is just beginning to feel the good of having money and to be conscious of his powers. Everybody is his friend; everybody flatters him and praises him —

and sincerely enough too. He is, unfortunately, so bright and attractive that the boys he goes with are all older — seventeen and eighteen — and some are sure to be the worst companions, and he will be led into everything. He wants so many things. It is this, that, or the other all the time. He wants horses and dogs and guns ; he wants to be grown-up. He begins to think he can go to the theater every night, and he has heard talk of the greenroom. He does n't want to read sensible things ; he wants a billiard table and he wants to give little dinners, and he wants a thousand things that of course I won't give the slightest countenance to. But if that sort of mind is in him, he will have all he wants in a short time some way or other. It is the inside of him that must be changed.

“How did it start? How do I know?” he continued. “These things have all cropped out this last year. I sent him to an expensive school and he swallowed every bit of the idle, braggart, boasting talk of some of those sickly, good-for-nothing sons of moneybags he heard. And everybody helps poison him. The very girls are beginning to act giggly and silly when the poor boy appears. I was determined he should see my

niece, Marjoribanks Pomeroy — the crown and glory of all girls — before he was a year older."

Of course Mrs. Pomeroy was all the more ready to scheme and plot about the welfare of handsome John Holland after that.

"You had better take my remedy for idle girls and let him have a ragamuffin to make a man of. If he did n't make a man of the ragamuffin, my word for it the ragamuffin would make a man of him."

"You are not in earnest?"

"Yes; partly so. There is a great truth in it."

"Well, you are interested?"

"Deeply. I certainly have never seen such a wonderfully attractive boy."

"Then if you are interested, do something! *You* can. You are my only hope. I have been distracted! Help him! Think about it! I shall be as wax in your hands" —

"How long can you stay?"

"I shall be obliged to be back in a week."

"If he enjoys himself and would care about staying longer, will you let us keep him a while?"

Mr. Pomeroy heaved a sigh of relief, wiped his face with his handkerchief, shook his sister's hand warmly, and said: —

“Thankfully! thankfully!”

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled; she was very fond of this younger brother of her husband, and always had been; but it was queer that Chester could be so very unlike David.

John and March took the rifle down the hill, first visiting Bessie’s playhouse. She was patiently waiting for them, addressed them as Mr. and Mrs. Pomeroy, and invited them in to take a cup of tea. The tea was a lukewarm mixture of sugar and water, but they drank it without a murmur.

“We are out hunting, Mrs. Cleveland,” said March ceremoniously on their departure. “From the top of the hill you might get a fine view of our prowess.”

March had fastened three little blackened blocks, with a white spot on each, on top of the spring house, and they fired away at them with great diligence.

John was taking aim; he was just about to pull the trigger.

“Don’t shoot, John, please,” said March very quietly.

“There, you spoiled my aim,” was the smiling answer, as he lowered the rifle. “You didn’t want me to beat you, did you?”

March was very pale.

"Why, March, what is the matter?"

She took the gun, fired it at an old stump, and when the report had died away said:—

"Do you see that black thing just over the edge of the spring house roof—right back of the target you were shooting at?"

"Yes; looks like a piece of fur."

"That is Bess' head."

As she spoke the thing moved, and soon Bessie's whole head came in view; then she stood up, waved her hand, and yelled:—

"G' on with your shootin'! I come up to find the bullets!"

All the color had left John's face. He was trembling.

"Sit down, John. It's all right now, you know."

He sat down on the hill and she sat down beside him. His gray eyes, dark with horror, looked into hers long and steadily.

"O March! how can I ever be thankful enough to God for that! If it had n't been for you—if you had n't been so quiet, if you had been excited just a little bit, I know I should have fired— O March!"

Bess came prancing up the hill.

"Well, why did n't you go on shootin'? Just spoiled all my fun! What's the matter with you two anyway? Are you mad?"

March did not feel like correcting anybody just at that minute.

"Did the girls make butter this morning?"

"Yep."

"Well, you bring to the arbor a pitcher of iced buttermilk and some of that new gingerbread; I have been smelling it for an hour. And you can have some too, if you keep quiet and don't talk."

"Oh, goody, goody, goody!" rattled Bess, and away she ran toward the kitchen, talking to herself as she went.

CHAPTER VI.

AND SHE TURNED HER BACK.

WHAT do you take the most interest in, March?" John was at the workbench in the shop, unconsciously dulling some of March's best tools, while she was lounging in the easy-chair making sketches of him. "You have all sorts of things in here — paints and crayons and wood and brass and clay. They are n't all fads, are they? What do you think you are going to do something in?"

March had smiled at first, but she became as serious as John himself.

"I have felt sort of restless," she said slowly, "uneasy, dissatisfied. These things are amusements. I have been sort of feeling around; but I — think — I know now. Over there; that is what I care for," pointing to the bay window and the clay. "Yes, John, honestly, I believe it is in me to do something that way. You care, don't you?"

The boy nodded. And the earnest beauty of his face as he looked at her made a curious little lump in her throat.

"You haven't seen the thing I have been working at all summer, have you — that bandaged thing? It is my 'Little Scrubber.' I am not going to do much more to it."

"Are you going to let me see it?" his face brightening.

She went over to the table and began to unwind the wrappings.

"It's my little scrubber," she said, smiling. "It is Bess, though I was n't particular about making it look like her."

"It does look like her just the same."

John stood very silently looking at it. He did not say anything more. March wondered if he were disappointed. She knew it was bad, but she knew that some things about it were faithful and true, that some of the body lines had great spirit and accuracy.

"Have you seen it enough?"

"Yes," he said with a slight sigh, and walked absent-mindedly out on the veranda.

He came in again in a moment, saying abruptly, —

"I heard what you were saying to Bess last night after she went to bed. I was in my room and heard."

"What of it?" said March, surprised. "I forget what I was talking to her about."

"You said she must be very careful of the inside of her; that she must be very careful not to think any bad thoughts, because if she did she could never get over it; that she must not listen to bad things, or if she thought a bad thought she must run outdoors and jump and play and forget it."

"Yes; I know. And I can't make her understand anything about it. I believe that she thinks a thought is something she has eaten."

John laughed.

"Perhaps she is n't very far off; but I sort of wanted to talk about it. Did you ever hear a bad story?"

"One; and I don't think more than one," March answered unflinchingly.

"Did you ever read a bad book?"

"What do you mean by a bad book?"

"Oh, a book that says things that you know are n't right, and that stick in your mind, and, if you're a boy, make you want to read some more like it."

"I don't believe I ever read any book called a bad book. I don't believe you need have said 'if you are a boy,' though."

“Why not?”

“Because that throws up the whole question. If there is any justification of things by reason of one’s being a boy or a girl, it takes away the real, true, black-and-white distinction between right and wrong.”

“I did n’t say there was any justification.”

“I know you did n’t; but that is the way it always begins. I have thought lots and lots about it, because mamma talked to me so much when I was little, I suppose. I know she was afraid of what bad stories and bad books can do. A mind is a mind, whether it happens to be in a boy or a girl, and right and wrong are right and wrong, without any reference to people at all; and if one’s mind, to be its best, is to be clean and true and right, then any winking at bad stories or harboring the ideas that come from bad books, no matter whether you think it can do you any harm or not, is wrong and bad and hurts the real us — the mind and the heart of us. And there is n’t anything we could get used to so soon as bad thoughts; and once used to them, they don’t shock us, and we don’t struggle against them, and we can never, never be our best. I am not talking about innocence. That is a very poor thing.

We ought to know our enemies ; not be ignorant ; and be ready to stand fast and fight and hold our citadel. We need a guard. Our guard must be good thoughts, high purposes, noble aims — the beautiful. Let our guard be strong and brave and ready. An innocent mind can be captured any time ; it is easy prey. But a guarded mind can make a brave fight if needs be.”

“I never could think to say all that.”

“But mamma has talked to me all my life. John,” hesitatingly, “you would n’t read bad books, would you, or really listen to bad stories ?”

He flushed slightly, but looking steadily at her said :—

“I have, lots of times.”

A look of bitter disappointment crossed her face. She went over to the bay window and stood with her back to him, looking out, but seeing nothing except a queer little cloud in the blue sky.

John waited a few moments, then left the room.

“It is n’t fair,” he said to himself.

He went downstairs, thinking he would go to the stables. He saw Mrs. Pomeroy sitting on the shady, vine-covered porch. He went out to her, kicked a cushion into place beside her, sat down,

put his head in her lap, secured one of her hands and began pressing it to his soft, warm lips.

She was very much surprised, but looking down at the beautiful face saw that the long eyelashes were wet.

"Poor old boy, my John!" she said soothingly, smoothing his forehead with her disengaged hand. "There, dear, has anybody been abusing you?"

"Well, I'd just like to take March out and pound her," he said. "I would just like to pound her!"

"I don't believe you could," laughed Mrs. Pomeroy.

"No, I don't know as I could pound very long, she's so strong; but I'd be glad to try."

"Tell me all about it, dear. Perhaps we can combine against her."

"I just will tell you."

He told the conversation accurately, while very queer thoughts chased through Mrs. Pomeroy's brain. She would not have had her daughter's disappointment one whit less. It came from a clear sense of right and wrong that went to the root of things, that perceived the subjectivity of evil, that dreaded the tiny sources of the great wrongs. She had striven sixteen years to this

end. And the boy at her knees—who had taught him? Such a good boy! A thousand woes upon her if she could not help this honest, fearless mind to a knowledge of the truth! A thousand shames if so good a mind should fall from the purity it was born to by ignorance and neglect!

“And now you know she just despises me; she thinks I am awful bad, and I’m not! I would n’t have said a word about it if I had thought she was going to take it that way. And oh, she’s a genius, a real genius! I know it clear down in my heart!”

“There, there, dear! she is very young, you know.”

“Well, she’s not so young as I am, and I didn’t feel so superior when Davis and Kendall and the fellows told queer things at Plunkton’s.”

The dissimilarity between the two cases struck him, and he laughed in a shamed way. “Anyway, I’m not going to listen to any more such things. But I think March was awful mean to go and stand with her back to me that way. I thought I was going to die then and there!”

“Poor boy! my dear, dear boy, John!” She

was playing with the beautiful hair. "How your mother would have loved you, John!"

"My mother? Maybe she would n't," perversely. "There! I'm sorry I said that! I just remember one thing about her. I had long hair and she had her hand on my head, and said, 'My pretty little boy! O God, if I could only take him with me!' I always remembered it, but I did n't know what it meant for a long while afterward. I suppose she was dying then."

"How old were you?"

"I don't know; three, perhaps."

"Do you remember your father?"

"No; not at all."

"Your mother must have been very beautiful."

"I don't know; my uncle said she was."

"Not Mr. Pomeroy?"

"No; he is n't my real uncle, you know. He never saw her. My uncle Howard Monroe."

"Your mother's brother?"

"Papa's brother."

"How was his name Monroe?"

"Don't you know? My name was Monroe. My mother's name was Holland. She went to college at the University of Vermont, and my father and his brother went there too. My

mother married John Monroe. He was a minister. They died. They were poor, I guess. But Howard Monroe made a lot of money. He never married. I guess he liked my mother. He took me to live with him and he called me Holland. He said he was going to leave me his money if I called myself John Holland, after my mother. And he died when I was eight years old and made Uncle Chester my guardian. So I'm John Holland."

When March heard John leave the room she felt more depressed than ever. How could it be that John — whom she felt as though she had known always — John, with such a splendid face, could spend one moment on low-toned books and low stories? How could it be that he should n't resent at once the advances of any one who could tell things that were not right? How could he fail to realize what it meant? what it showed about himself? what it would lead to? She had never felt so utterly cast down and miserable before in her life. There seemed to be a sort of horror about everything.

"O John!" she said aloud as she turned from the window.

She felt as though she must do something to

shake off the depression. She would look up Bess.

She found Bess, but found also that she had shirked and slighted all her work, and was nearer the verge of impudence than she had been for a long time.

"You have not picked the things up off your room floor, nor wiped out your washbasin, nor hung your sponge in the sun" —

"Oh, well, I don't care!"

March escorted her to the neglected room and made her improve its appearance.

Bess waved the duster carelessly over the table.

"Go back and dust that table properly!"

Bess shook the duster at it again.

"Go to that table and dust it!"

Bess sauntered back to the table and gave it a few careless daubs. She was evidently daring a disturbance.

March grasped her closely by the wrists and proceeded to make her rub the table energetically, not sparing to bump her head when opportunity offered.

"Get your tick!"

Bess brought the dreaded ticking with a look of some apprehension.

March pinned her into it, tore some calico into strips and tied Bess into a chair so that she could n't rise or move her head, placed the chair in front of the looking-glass, handed her a scrubbing brush, and left her with the remark :—

“You shall stay there until you think you know enough to act properly while you have the chance. Otherwise you won't long have the chance.”

“There's tyranny for you!” March muttered to herself. “One good thing, it always has a good effect on her. But you need n't gloat over it so. Imagine John being as brutal as that!”

She went downstairs aimlessly, and going out on the porch saw John with his head on her mother's lap. They both looked up at her and were equally astonished. Who had ever seen March look so miserable and unhappy as that? But John was sure he discovered an irrepressible disgust for himself. He struggled for a moment to look unconcerned and then, turning his head over in his arms on Mrs. Pomeroy's lap, his shoulders began to shake with sobs.

“There, darling! bless your dear heart, child!” began Mrs. Pomeroy.

But March was overwhelmed. Was this some more of her brutality? A pretty person she was!

Somebody had better come and find fault with her and see how she liked it! And John had been so honest and earnest about it all!

The tears sprang to her eyes, and thinking that woe would be henceforth her natural element she dropped on the porch on the other side of her mother, determined not to be entirely ousted from her natural refuge by John, and began to cry also in a silent, forlorn way.

Mrs. Pomeroy could not help smiling over those two heads, the dark one and the fair, both prostrated with grief in her motherly lap. John, feeling something bumping his head, moved sufficiently to assure himself that the bumping force was March's head, and curiosity induced him to take a further look. He saw Mrs. Pomeroy's scarcely repressed smile and burst into a nervous laugh.

March looked up quickly.

"There, March!" he said, "if you had n't made a fool of yourself too, I should have gone home this very afternoon! I'm going to stay now, for you can't say anything. But I could n't stand it, to have you thinking such mean things about me!"

"You'll never know how sorry I've been I made you feel badly. I have decided I am a born brute. Bess is strapped to a chair now, in an

awfully uncomfortable position." March's tone was so woe-begone that Mrs. Pomeroy and John both laughed.

The air seemed to clear; March rose and took a chair.

"I have the awfulest feeling inside of me. I know it is wretchedness, but all the same," weakly, "it is a feeling that is always vanquished by something good to eat. And it is so hot to-day! John, do you suppose you could feel sufficiently friendly toward me to come down cellar with me and make some ice cream? It won't take long; and there are some macaroons yet, and we shall feel better. I'll unstrap Bess."

John assented with alacrity. He loathed regrets and miserable feelings, and ice cream seemed to be the exact remedy.

March untied Bess.

"Will you be good and mind me about things?"

"I just guess I will! This'll learn me a lesson!" with an air of unparalleled virtue.

"We are going to make ice cream, and you can help and you can have some" --

"Oh, goody! you dear, sweet thing!" and the rest of that morning March was fairly overloaded with attentions from the repentant Bess.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO SIDES.

WHEN Mr. Pomeroy announced that his visit was drawing to a close, John was very glad to avail himself of Mrs. Pomeroy's invitation to stay longer. He had not had half enough of the workshop and the tennis, the riding, the driving, the getting better acquainted, and all the rest of it.

"What do you do up in the workshop, John?" asked Mr. Pomeroy, "pick up thread?"

"Oh, come now, Uncle Chester!" was the deprecating answer.

"If you don't humor my weak points, you see, I shall tell that story."

"I think perhaps I can give a sop to Cerberus for one day longer," laughed John, "and then you will be gone. I mean to stay just as long as I can!"

"And not a fellow around here!"

"Oh, but there are!" quickly. "March is going to give a tennis party next Saturday, and she says she will have quite a good many boys, five surely."

March had decided that John ought to be introduced to her friends, and had also decided to have some of them spend the afternoon there. Refreshments were to be served on the lawn, and March devoutly hoped that her guests would be able to entertain themselves with tennis and archery. March was not a great favorite with the young people. Sometimes when she met them in a social way she would be so bright and talkative and amusing that she would be the center of attraction, and they would all be ready to do her honor. Then, disappointing to the interest and liking she had aroused, she would not exert herself in the least to see any of them again, or else not try in the least to conceal her bored feelings if they sought her. So that on the whole the impression she made was favorable to her abilities and appearance, but rather the reverse as regarded amiability.

Mrs. Pomeroy was well aware of this, and had hoped that Bessie's presence had done enough toward shaking March out of herself to result in making her more thoughtful for the feelings of others.

"Tell me who are coming, March," said John Friday night as he swung in the hammock on the

porch, while March and her mother were sitting not far from him.

"Which sort, girls or boys?"

"Boys."

"Grace Hill is the prettiest girl. She has a fluffy yellow bang, and is considered to do great damage among young boys. She is eighteen or thereabouts, and she laughs a great deal and uses a fan very effectively. When a boy tells her anything that anybody could possibly laugh at, she shakes all over with merriment and says, 'How killing! how perfectly killing!'"

March changed her voice so completely on the quotation that her listeners laughed involuntarily.

"Then there is Kate Ludlow; she is a bouncing sort of a girl—a boy's girl. She runs instead of walks, if any one is looking at her, and likes to appear to know something about baseball, though she really does n't; and wears dickeys, and likes to speak of people by their last names, when she dares; and is a little bit slangy, very mildly so, and says, 'How jolly! how awfully jolly!'"

Again the voice was a complete surprise and there was another burst of laughter.

"Nellie Starr, she is a nondescript sort of an

individual; always agrees with every one in turn, wishes she were prettier, wishes she had more style, wishes she could say bright things like other girls; does everything she does very poorly; tries to wear things that are becoming to other people and can't see why they do not look the same on her. She feels nervous when any one talks to her, and the only thing she can ever think of to say at first, she gets so confused, is, 'Well — I don't know — really.' "

Another laugh.

"I'll tell about the boys now. They are a curious tribe. There is Howard Davis; he is twenty and is sometimes used as a cat's-paw in the older set, but he is quite a grandfather in ours. He has a moustache of no particular color, and he keeps feeling of it. His hair is a constant surprise; sometimes it is very long, sometimes short, sometimes pompadour, sometimes glued down to his head. He started to go to college, but something happened, and he is home lounging around doing nothing. Nobody knows just what did happen, but he tries to look very knowing and secretive, and the general impression among the girls is that he must have been 'quite too awfully wicked.' For my part, I think he simply failed in

all his examinations, and that his father refused to pay bills any longer for such a fool. He hates me, for he knows I think he is an idiot. He always talks in a knowing way about 'the girls.'

"There is Rodney Harper ; he is a sort of a nice boy, red-headed, and rather awkward. He has n't much to say, but he smiles broadly, and prefers to take a position where he will not seem to vie with the graces and brilliancies of the other fellows.

"Tom Curtis is a sickly boy ; his mother always has him wear rubbers. You will see to-morrow he will come with rubbers, and a crocheted scarf to tie his neck up. He wears cotton in his ears. He sings very prettily and plays on the banjo. All I ever heard him say, to remember the words, were things like this : 'The ground is getting very dawmp.' 'I really cawn't eat it ; I am under the physician's care just now.' 'I certainly feel a drawft between these trees.'"

There was another laugh.

"I'm not going to tell about any more ; you can see them for yourself."

"Aunt Pomeroy," said John, who had adopted that form of address greatly to his satisfaction, "does she talk so about everybody?"

“Ask her.”

“Do you, March?”

“Oh, I don’t know ; why?”

“Why, do you know,” said John slowly and in an apologetic, tentative way, “that it made me feel awfully to have you tell about them that way. I could n’t help laughing, you know ; nobody could. But — well, I suppose it was all right, but real people never seemed so horrid to me as these friends of yours — and they can’t be so much worse than the average, can they? Why — why, they would make me tired! Aren’t there nicer things about them?”

March did not answer, and John said anxiously, “You don’t care, do you, March? You must n’t mind what I said.”

“I was only thinking,” she said. “I felt sort of mean myself, talking about them so, but more because they were coming here to-morrow than for any other reason. You could n’t do a thing like that, could you? And I’m sure it would n’t be because you could n’t see as much as I. Well, I don’t like it myself, and you don’t, do you, mamma, poor soul? John, see here! to-morrow evening you tell me about the same ones I have told you about.”

"All right." The thought of this task before him rather added to the zest of John's enjoyment of the tennis party the next afternoon.

March liked to have everything with which she was identified successful, but, apart from that, she wished the afternoon to be especially pleasant on John's account. The tennis court had been put into first-class order; and the carriage drive had received considerable attention from Albert. The wide porch was berugged and footstooled and easy-chaired and draped, until it looked like a very luxurious bower. Three tables were in the coolest spots, and on them stood huge bowls of lemonade; mounting guard in each bowl was a great, dazzling block of ice. Little glasses surrounded the bowls in orderly files, and it was all March could do to keep Bess, who was wild as usual over the prospect of company, from drinking out of one of every color, to discover if there might be an accompanying difference in flavor. The girl was in her favorite white dress, and was so excited as to be almost uncontrollable. The repeated and most emphatic assurances that she was a person of no consequence whatever, and not looked upon as the hostess by the coming tennis players, had not the slightest effect.

"Oh, when will they be here? I simply can't wait! There they are! No, they're not either! Oh, when *will* they be here?"

"If you don't keep quiet," said the easily exasperated March, "you shall go straight down to the kitchen and not come out once until every one is gone."

"My, but I will be still! I'll be so quiet! I don't want to be learned any more lessons to-night;" and the young woman was as quiet and unobtrusive as possible.

"She is a regular little timeserver," said March to John. "I could have begged her on my knees to be peaceable and she would not have paid the slightest attention; but to serve her own interest see how well she can behave!"

"Well, we're all that way, get right down to it," was the philosophical answer.

The young people came in three carriages, two double ones, and Howard Davis and Grace Hill drove up in a buggy. The carriages were taken to the barn, and the porch was all alive with bright costumes and much laughter and a great deal of chatter. The boys all met John with friendly patronage, feeling that they were considerably older; but the girls, one and all, either by looks

or words, expressed their admiration. "Handsomest boy I ever saw in my life," was the universal opinion.

John found himself by Nellie Starr; he thought he should have known her without an introduction. He sought in vain for something to say to her, she seemed so confused, and finally said, "Did you find it warm driving?"

"Well — I don't know — really," she said helplessly, and the poor boy almost laughed aloud.

"I wish you would play tennis with me," he said confidentially. "I don't know any of these. Would you mind? that is, if March gives us a chance to choose our partners."

"Yes, I'd like to," she said, blushing again; "but I did n't expect to play at all, I am such a miserable player; nobody really enjoys playing with me. Now March is such a wonderful player. I wish I could play as she does!"

"You will be just the partner for me, for I am a good player and can help you. Come over and have some lemonade."

He saw Tom Curtis, whom he knew at once, though the boy neither wore rubbers nor a tippet, nor cotton in his ears, talking to Mrs. Pomeroy, and he went over to speak to him.

"Won't you have some of the iced lemonade to cool you off?"

"No, thanks; I really cawn't take iced drinks, though one wants to in such hot weather," was the reply in a pleasant voice.

John did not dare look at Mrs. Pomeroy, and grew violently red when he saw March looking laughingly at him. But March was not thinking of their conversation of the preceding evening. She merely could not help contrasting the pale, thin-chested, frail-looking Curtis boy with the strong, alert, graceful boy beside him.

After resting a while, four of the group betook themselves to the tennis court, while the rest either watched the game or patronized the archery ground. The tennis game was played by Howard Davis and Miss Hill, John and Nellie Starr. Nellie Starr's playing was a thing of wonder: she would strike wildly with her racket, hitting the ball on the edge, or on the handle, or not at all.

"Oh, mercy!" she would say at each bad play, while the others would laugh.

When it was her turn to serve it was a strange event if she managed to escape a double fault; but when she did serve a ball into the proper

court it was rarely returned. The ball would either drop weakly over the net without a particle of bound, or fall within the line without the slightest previous indication that it could possibly do so. When either Davis or Miss Hill failed to return such a ball Miss Hill's laugh would trill forth as a sort of drapery for the words "How perfectly killing!" and Davis would say, "How absurd!" Davis played very well indeed and so did Miss Hill; but John was almost an expert; and to Nellie Starr's unbounded astonishment she was on the winning side. Such a thing had never before happened in the annals of her experience.

Bess was careering around wherever she would show to the best advantage, though keeping most discreetly out of March's reach. Every one spoke to her, and her answers were always received with bursts of laughter.

"Bessie says Miss Starr is getting *winded*," cried out one of the boys.

"How do you like country life, Bess?"

"Oh, middlin' well; only there ain't much goin' on."

"Does Miss March make you study?"

"Like everything!"

"Can you spell anything?"

"I should think I could! F-o-x, fox; b-o-x, box; g-i-r-l, girl; Fanny, capital F-a-n, Fan, n-y, ny, Fanny; Ponto, P-r-t, Pont, t-y, ty, Ponto."

The last stroke brought down the house.

"What do you think of Mr. Davis, Bessie?" asked Miss Hill coaxingly.

"I think he 'd be in the soup if I had much to do with him!"

March heard the laughter that followed that, and wondered impatiently how long it would be before Bess could be toned down after this dissipation.

"Queer that children ever grow up decent when fools are ready to egg them on to impudence and forwardness," she said to Sadie Hopkins; and then she realized what a terrible thing she had said, by insinuation, of her own guests, and added despairingly, "You must know I did n't mean that!"

"Bless your heart!" said the girl, smiling, "I feel exactly so myself! You know we have three small children at home: they are all bright, and we get so angry at people who ought to know better for encouraging them to be naughty that we don't know what to do. No, indeed! you need n't mind me."

March experienced something more like the warm glow of friendship for the speaker than she had ever felt before.

The outdoor air seemed to have made every one, unless Tom Curtis should be excepted, voraciously hungry, and the refreshments served outdoors were complimented on every side by word and deed. The way those delicious molds of ice cream disappeared was a matter of wonder to Mary Ann and Molly, who, arrayed in clean gowns and white aprons, smilingly assisted at the feast.

After a little desultory conversation on the porch, a little walking around, a little banjo and mandolin music, and a little singing, the guests, with many warm expressions of their afternoon's pleasure, drove away talking and singing in the moonlight. Bess was dispatched to bed. John and March indulged in another plate each of ice cream, and Mrs. Pomeroy reminded John that he was to tell about the guests March had described.

"Oh," said John, "to begin with, I thought that Davis was a regular puppy; only I don't believe I should have thought so if it had n't been for March, for he reminded me ever so much of Jack Kendall, and I used to think Jack was 'way up.

You see, he said, 'Allow me to tell you, Miss March, that you are looking charmingly this afternoon,' and he made a low bow and he looked so conceited it made me awful mad. March did look just shining, for a fact, but he only said so to admire his way of talking—let alone it was bad grammar—and then he was horrid to Miss Starr, and he acted just insufferably silly to everybody else."

"There, John!" said March in a very superior tone, "I cannot allow you to speak in this manner of my guests! It pains me!"

"Oh, you!" laughed John. "I thought Miss Starr was awfully nice, and I know a lot about her. She told me that they don't have much money and she has a little brother, and she is so anxious he shall have an education, and she tries awfully hard to improve herself so that she can help him. She wants to do something to earn her living. She wishes she knew you better, March, because she could learn so much from you, and it made me feel downright bad the way she talked about you; she admires you so and thinks you are so wonderful; and you *could* help her too, if you chose to, because you could help anybody!"

“Taffy!”

“I liked that Miss Hopkins ever so much, only I don’t have to tell about her. And that Curtis is real nice. I think he is a good fellow. His mother is the fussiest invalid ever was, and unless he wants to make her sick he has to do all sorts of babyfied things to suit her, and of course it has made him finicky: but I think it is brave of him to humor her and not mind what the others say, because he must know they do make fun of him! And Rodney Harper is splendid! he says he will ride up for us to go fishing. He knows where there is jolly fishing. He has a brother Charlie, too, and he says Charlie is a real nice boy, about fourteen, and that I would like him. He says he always has his brother with him, he is such good company.”

“Charlie is a nice boy,” assented March. “He looks just like Rod.”

“I didn’t see those other two girls much, so I’m done. I think you had a fine party, March, and you made everybody feel at home and have a good time.”

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR IDLE BOYS.

SO you think I ought to find a little boy to bring up?" John brought his feet from off the divan on which he was lounging, firmly on the floor, and sat erect, his hands on his knees, gazing at March in astonishment.

"Not bring up exactly," said March, beginning to laugh; "but to help along and give a good start in life. Why, your allowance is sixty dollars a month, and the only thing you do for yourself is to buy your clothes."

"Why, March," interrupted John, "whatever would I do with him?"

"Put him in school; put him where he could learn a trade; use your money to help make up to one little fellow something he has n't, and never had, that you have and always have had. Take an interest in him; write to him. Take him little trips with you; send him books; encourage him. Maybe you would happen on a boy who wants an education. If not, help him to some

way of earning an honest living—that is the phrase the books use.”

John had been lying on the divan looking at some of March's plenteous literature about destitute children, and talking about some of the cases mentioned, as they often had before. But March was not as yet much like her mother; she had no fear lest she might overinfluence some unfortunate mortal. She was willing to talk, urge, persuade while life lasted, if needs were, to bring some one around to her view. She doted on cajoling people to adopt her opinions; though it was as undoubtedly one of her characteristics that she felt keen interest in views opposing her own, and liked the holders thereof more, rather than less, for differing from her. March had been quite willing, when the idea occurred to her, to propound to John the feasibility of his passing some of his good fortune along. John was silently staring at her, and she examined his expression with a scientific eye.

“Think it will work. He can see the sense of it as well as I can. He likes the novelty of it. He believes in it himself. He thinks it will be a good joke. He is imagining what Uncle Chester will say. He is talking with mother about it.

I do verily believe he is thinking of some particular, identical, individual boy." As this thought quickly formed itself in her mind, March cried out :—

"What is his name, John?"

"Ted — Ted Larrimer," was the absent answer. Then he looked up quickly. "Why, March, how funny! How did you know?"

"There, I can't draw another stroke I'm so excited! Come on, let's get the horses and have a good ride up to the bend."

"All right; but I saw Albert starting off up the road;" and John dropped back in his seat as though that ended it.

"Yes, I know; I saw him too. Come on."

John hesitated. "Why, March, I—I never saddled a horse."

"Well, it is high time you learned how then," laughing. "Come on, dear, and I'll show you."

"Can you saddle horses and harness them, and all?"

"Yes, indeed; always could, I guess. It's no trouble at all."

After John had been initiated into the mysteries of saddling a horse, and had discovered how easy it was, they rode away in the delicious fresh-

ness of early morning. The roads were in fine condition; the horses were full of life. After a sharp trot to work off a little surplus energy, they walked their horses side by side, and returned to the subject of conversation.

“Who is Ted Larrimer?”

“Oh, he is the funniest, brightest little boy! He is about nine; and blacks shoes and sells papers, and is as quick and jolly as he can be. He used to black my shoes for me last winter, and I always paid him whatever money I had in my pocket, and of course he liked it. He lived with his grandmother. I guess he earned about all they had; but she is either dead or in an Old Ladies’ Home, or something, for I saw him just before I came down here, and he was n’t with her then. But I don’t believe he would like living anywhere except on the street.”

“Perhaps he would; you could n’t tell until you asked him.”

“No; but oh, he is a regular little tough, you know; smokes and chews and swears, and all that. All the older newsboys egg him on, he is so little and funny; and the men he shines for, and who regularly buy his papers, encourage him too.”

"And didn't you ever say anything to him about it?"

"Meaning, didn't I get him to sign a pledge and go to Sunday-school? March, March, you must remember I haven't seen him since I have been acquainted with you, or he would probably now be holding prayer meetings evenings among the boys. But honestly," more seriously, "I'll try to make it up to him now, if he will let me, and you will tell me what to do."

But though March was interested in Ted and his fortunes, the day was too fine and other topics too numerous and interesting to conduce to any satisfactory settlement of Ted's future. So that by lunch time, when the horses were drying off in the stables, and John and March had alternately elaborated on their morning's ride, the question was all ready to be handed over bodily to Mrs. Pomeroy.

Bess was all eyes and ears, but beyond an occasional easily squelched "Wh-? what? when? where?" was not especially obtrusive.

"I wish we could see Ted too," said Mrs. Pomeroy thoughtfully. "I feel a warm interest in the little fellow already. You are quite an eloquent advocate, John."

"And so do I wish we could see him. Can't he come down here?" put in March.

"Dear me, March! he would die here, he would feel so embarrassed and out of place."

"Let him stay at Dixons', then," piped up Bess.

March always used to say that one of the most aggravating things about Bess was that she so often was exactly right that there was not very much more to be said. When Mrs. Pomeroy would ask March a question it was perverse of all discipline to have Bess answer as quick as lightning; and though she might be reproved for answering a question she was not asked, she would nevertheless be elated by the consciousness that she had answered rightly.

And now all three of the elders wondered that Dixons' had not been thought of at once. Dixon was the tenant, and lived in a neat little farmhouse about a quarter of a mile away. The only two children were both grown and away from home. Mrs. Pomeroy had always supplied him in the summer time with some little city boy sent by a Fresh Air Society, a boy who worked in a mild way, under Mr. Dixon's supervision, for his summer's outing. The boy who had been sent this summer had not enjoyed Mr. Dixon's views

of life, nor had Mr. Dixon had much patience with him. As an upshot, the boy had run away after a month's sojourn, and Mr. Dixon had reigned alone the remainder of the summer.

"That is so. Ted could certainly come and stay at the Dixons' for a few days, if that seemed best after he arrived, or longer, if you wished to have him."

"That would be just fine!" said John enthusiastically. "I would like him to see you, Mrs. Pomeroy. You could do such a lot with Ted — only I suppose March would be the one he would prostrate himself before."

"Ted and me," said Bess, "can play together."

"Ted and I," corrected March.

"Yes, that's what I said."

"Say Ted and I will play together."

"Ted and I."

"Say it all."

"Well, I forgot what it was about now."

"I'll write to Uncle Chester this afternoon; though — wait! I must see if I have money enough. How much would it cost to keep him in school?"

"You can find good schools for three hundred and fifty a year."

"And say a hundred more for clothes and things. That would only leave me two hundred and seventy a year! Great Scott!"

"Well, that is more than I have now. I only have twenty dollars a month, and I get along all right."

John shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Well, then, I can, I suppose! I'll make out some way. I'll dress in blue jeans and a straw hat all the year around, and sell my watch and my 'byke,' and get a place as an elevator boy—and mount to something."

"You poor thing!" said Bess. "I'll give you my five cents—as long's I ain't never goin' to be allowed to spend it," she added in an aggrieved tone.

"That last rather detracts from the generosity of your remark, but I'll take it for what it is worth."

"It is worth five cents," was the practical reply.

After lunch Bess collected her things to go down to the tollgate to take her sewing lesson, while Mrs. Pomeroy and March and John went up to the library to compose the important letter to John's guardian.

March had tried very hard to teach Bess to

read and write. She worked ten minutes for two successive days, and as Bess was still not able to read at the end of the second day, March could not help feeling that there was something lacking in her mind. That was the statement she made, and there was a certain amount of truth in it. She herself had learned to read before she could remember, and she could not realize what a difficult matter it was for a mind disciplined rather to flightiness and inconsequence than to studiousness, to acquire control of the alphabet. The writing seemed likely to prove a matter of even greater difficulty, and as for sewing, March was sure that life itself would not be long enough to teach Bess that feminine accomplishment.

“Mamma Pomeroy, how did you *ever* teach me? I wonder you are n’t as gray as a poplar!” And March felt a respect for her mother’s abilities that she was positive she would never have cause to feel for her own.

But one day while driving by the tollgate, Mrs. Cole informed her that her sister was coming to live with her. “Broke down in health, her husband having died after a long illness, and all their little fortune gone, and she with such an education — equal to any!”

March did not think any more about that news until she saw a pale, very pleasant-looking woman, very neatly dressed, sitting on the tollhouse porch. "I just will see if she won't teach Bess," thought March promptly; and on receiving her mother's approval, an engagement was speedily entered into.

Mrs. Shedd was glad to teach Bess the required time—an hour and a half in the morning, and an hour in the afternoon—for the sake of the occupation and of the money. Under her instruction Bess began to learn very fast.

"Well, what shall I say?" asked John. "Shall I just ask him if he will let me use some of my money in putting Ted Larrimer in school, if he wants to go to school? Then I'll ask him to see Ted and give him the letter I shall write him, and then fix him up and send him down here. Uncle Chester is the most obliging man you ever did see, no matter how much he makes fun."

"Tell him that you don't mean to make Ted an excuse for drawing more money," said March.

"Tell him to send Ted down, even if he doesn't wish you to go into this sort of thing," added Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Oh, I'll tell him that you are at the bottom

of this whole thing, Aunt Pomeroy!" and John's eyes danced. "You are a plotter and a schemer, trying to put a poor, dear, innocent little boy — no, two dear, innocent little boys like Ted and John Holland — into a box that we can't get out of all our lives. Well, now, here goes! I shall write this letter, and it can be criticized afterwards."

When Mr. Pomeroy received his ward's letter he smiled broadly.

"That boy is all right now, thank the Lord! I never could have done anything in the world for him like that. Lois Marjoribanks Pomeroy is the most remarkable woman! And that handsome little March will be the next. Ted Larri-mer? Well, John might as well have Ted, if he can get him, as to have horses and dogs and dinners and wickedness. If he spends his money on Ted, I don't see how he *can* spend it on everything else too! I hope Ted will be expensive. I hope Ted will worry the life out of him, and let him see how it feels. I'll go and interview the little imp now. Yes, indeed, I'll help it along! My gray hairs would have come in sorrow to their grave if John kept on as he promised last winter; and I love the boy! I love

that boy!" He said the last words aloud, thinking instantly, "Now don't be a fool; he does n't care two raps for you!"

He went to the corner of Third and Jefferson streets, as his directions read, and he had no difficulty in recognizing Ted, who was yelling vociferously, —

"Shine 'em up! Shine 'em up! Shine, sir?"

"Yes; I'll take a shine," said Mr. Pomeroy. "Don't you shine for a ward of mine, John Holland?"

"Feller that looks like an angel — such a yeller head on him, and laughs and would pay a whole dollar a shine, and allus askin' after granny? *You* know him? Jiminy! I looks fer him day in and day out, only I don't never see him no more!"

"He is out in the country. I had a letter from him to-day, and he spoke about you."

"Me?" ejaculated Ted, suspending operations and sitting back on his heels. "*Me*, Ted Larri-mer? Sure he meant me?"

"Oh, yes, he meant you; that is why I came down here — he sent me. He said he thought it must be awfully hot for you all summer in the city, and that if you would like a vacation for

three or four days, or a week, down near him, he would like to pay for your trip and have you come."

"Oh, you're monkeyin' with me!" said Ted desolately.

"No; I'm in earnest. He sent me the money to get you a good suit so you would feel comfortable traveling, and I'll put you on the train."

"What's it fer?" said the boy suspiciously.

"It is n't for anything except the fun of it, unless he wants to see you. But if you don't want to go, I'll write and tell him."

"See here!" said the boy quickly, "don't get upset! I'm dyin' to go, and I will, too, whatever comes of it! Only it *do* comflustrate me, sure 's yer born!"

"All right. You need n't give me any change. Come around to me next Thursday at nine o'clock. Here's the address. Good-by!"

And Mr. Pomeroy strode down the street, leaving Ted running his fingers through his hair and giving vent to long, low, perplexed whistles.

And John received a letter saying, —

Ted will reach you Thursday on the 4.10. If you act with the approval of Mrs. Pomeroy, I have nothing to say. But remember what your allowance is.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE TEDDY LARRIMER.

IT was a very uneasy boy who stepped off the 4.10 train at Wellsburg on Thursday afternoon. He felt far more awkward in his new shoes and stockings, his new gray suit and shirt-waist, and his new hat, than he ever had in his motley business array. He scowled up the platform, on his arrival at the station, and then his face brightened all over as he saw John Holland come smiling toward him.

“Halloo, Ted! I’m so glad to see you! How are you anyway?”

“All O. K.,” mumbled Ted, suddenly losing his tongue, but feeling very happy.

“Here’s our trap, Ted; we will have a jolly drive home. How did you leave my Uncle Chester?”

“Oh, all O. K.!” replied Ted, wishing bitterly that he could think of something else to say.

They seated themselves in the phaëton, and John strove during the ride home to arouse Ted’s conversational powers to their wonted activity, but it was no use.

Ted was all eyes and smiles. He listened eagerly to the water down the ravine, almost bent his head off turning to look at some of the large trees they passed, and John decided with reason that it certainly was not dissatisfaction which kept his little companion silent. Ted knew what the matter was. He was trying desperately to form a sentence which would enable him to appropriately thank this hero beside him. For Ted was a hero worshiper in the first and most violent stages, and his hero was this strong, beautiful, gracious, genial boy beside him; this free-hearted boy with the rollicking laugh and happy eyes and generous hands.

“Let him alone, and he ’ll come home
And bring his tail behind him,”

thought John as he looked in an amused way at the very alive face beside him.

“Say!” said Ted, picking at the knees of his short pants, and reddening perceptibly, “I think it was durned good of you to gi’ me a vacation an’ everything, only I can’t think how to tell you” —

“Oh, pshaw!” said John, reddening himself, and wondering at the strange way his heart leaped.

"If you 'll only have a good time, it will be jolly. I bothered a little for fear you would n't enjoy it, and would miss the boys out here in the country. I'll tell you where you are to be — at a real cozy, jolly farmhouse. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon are as kind as can be, and used to boys. The house is a little way from where I am visiting. Now, really, I wanted you to come down here because I have a scheme I wanted to see you about; but I am not going to talk about that for a couple of days. Did you ever go fishing?"

"Nope."

"Well, two friends of mine are coming up in a day or so for fishing and we'll all go. I have a nice rod here you can have. Fishing is pretty good sport, I can tell you!"

John let Ted out at the Dixons', and good, motherly Mrs. Dixon, standing on the steps in a clean white apron, gave him a hearty kiss, much to his embarrassment.

"There, dear!" she said, "I want you to feel right at home. I'm Aunt Sal to all the children, and I'm Aunt Sal to you. Bless your dear heart, how you will enjoy our country doin's! and I've planned a regular company supper for you too! I wish t' you'd stay, Master John!"

John had become the apple of Mrs. Dixon's eye, and she had resolved to make things exceptionally pleasant for Ted on his account ; but as she said to her husband, "I no sooner set eyes on that dear little feller's lovin' face, Jerry Dixon, than I says to myself, says I, Well, I 'll do well by him, sure ! Regular little gentleman he looks like in his new clothes !"

"I shall leave Ted this evening to get acquainted with you and Uncle Jerry ; but I am coming over for him after supper to take him up to the house. You will have to look pretty sharp here, Ted ! I've heard people say Mrs. Dixon was the best woman in the world, and it takes pretty good men and boys to live with that sort of a woman."

Mrs. Dixon raised her plump hands. "Land ! how you do run on — always a-flatterin' everybody !"

When John had driven on, Mrs. Dixon poured some water in the tin basin in the sink.

"Now you can just freshen up a bit and I'll show you your room."

The room was a very small affair, containing a bed and one chair and some nails which took the place of a closet or wardrobe. But the bed was

so clean and fresh looking, and such a nice white curtain puffed in and out at the open window, and such bright chromos hung on the wall, that Ted thought the room was perfection.

"Do I sleep in that there bed?" pointing to it respectfully.

"Just there! And it is a clean, sweet bed too; and that door opens into our room, and if you wake up in the night, just holler; I'll mind you."

Ted was sure he should n't want to "holler," but it gave him quite an unwonted sense of being cared for that almost oppressed him.

In the few minutes that elapsed before that wonderful supper that Ted kept smelling, turn where he would, he saw the stable and the cow-yard, the chickens, and the shirt-sleeved, booted, rubicund Mr. Dixon.

"Ain't you a little feller! We'll toughen you up a bit out here! Got any muscle? Lay holt of that handcart there and push it to me! We'll sort o' improve ye, maybe!"

And Ted was filled with a desire to assist Mr. Dixon in such a way as to win credit for his muscle. The next minute Mrs. Dixon's cheery voice sang out, "Come now, you men folks, supper's just to the turn!"

"Men folks"—that was fine! Ted swelled his chest out and measured himself by Mr. Dixon. He watched him wash himself, comb his hair, and slip on his coat. He wished he could do so. Mr. Dixon did an odd thing before they began to eat which somewhat nonplused him.

"That 's the grace, dear," nodded Mrs. Dixon, seeing his astonishment.

But that supper! Such fried chicken and puffy soda biscuits and delicious milk gravy and strawberry jam and milk to drink and golden custard, and cake that beat anything in a confectioner's windows.

Ted did not talk much. He kept his eyes fastened on his plate, almost afraid those delicious things would vanish away out of his sight, and ate and ate. He was ravenously hungry. But at last he could eat no more. He leaned his head on the back of his chair and gazed in a restful, satisfied, dreamy way at Mrs. Dixon.

"I'm full!" he said, "full to the neck! I never had such a feed as that before in my life!"

"Ain't it a pleasure to see the little feller eat, Jerry? Yes, dear, I calculate to fatten you up considerable!"

Ted's tongue was loose enough that evening,

when John came for him. That fine supper, everything he had seen, his new friends, his very own room. "And, jolly! how I wish t' I'd saved some of that jam and all them things for you! I never see such good eatin'. And me go and eat it all myself — sech durned stinginess!" regretfully.

When they were near the house Bess came running to meet them crying, "Halloo, Ted! how do you do, Ted? I'm Bessie Pomeroy!" grasping his hand and smiling into his face. "I'm so glad to see you, Ted! Here's Ted!"

"Well, I'm glad to see *you!*" said Ted, striving to say the right thing, and really very much relieved to find a child to deal with.

March came down the walk with a pleasant, "So this is Ted. Shake hands! Glad to see you!"

Mrs. Pomeroy greeted him cordially and had him sit on a stool near her chair. They tried to talk to him, but he had suddenly lost his voice again and could not go beyond a murmured monosyllable.

Bess kept pulling at him and urging him to accompany her, and Mrs. Pomeroy, to relieve him, suggested that he might go.

They could hear the children talking after they left the porch, Bessie's voice sounding like the tinkling of a bell, intermitted occasionally for a brief response from Ted.

"What do you think of him, March?"

"Why, I think he is a splendid little boy. What a nice face he has!"

John felt as though he had been praised himself. "When are you going to let him know what your plan is, John?" asked Mrs. Pomeroy.

"The more I think of it, it seems to me I ought to do it right away. I thought perhaps I would take him off fishing to-morrow morning, and have it out. I would feel mightily disappointed if he went back on me now!"

So the next morning found John and Ted with fishing rods, swinging along at an easy rate toward Riggs Pool, a place where tradition taught that there had been fish, though none had been caught there to anybody's actual knowledge.

When they were comfortably seated on the grassy bank in the thick shade of the trees John began: "What would you like to be when you are grown up, Ted?"

"A farmer," was the prompt reply.

"What did you want to be before yesterday?"

"A slugger!"

"Anything else?"

"Run a fire engine; but I don't think much of that business now."

"Well, Ted, I'll tell you what I want of you — why I wanted you to come down here. Only I'm afraid you won't understand."

"Oh, I'll make out to catch on," said Ted eagerly, "if it's anything I kin help you in!"

"Yes, it is to help me, too, as I shall try to explain; but perhaps you will think at first it is only to help you."

"I'm a-listenin'," said Ted finally, as John did not continue his remarks.

"You see, Ted, it's this way. Some way or other, I never could tell how, or you either, there's two of us, you and I, and you are all alone with no money, nor anybody to help you along and give you a help on the road up; and I've got lots of money and ever so many people to help me along. Now, thinking it over, I can't see that there is any reason for it. It isn't your fault that you haven't the good things; it isn't my credit that I have. Now I would like to form a partnership with you. I'd like you to let me pay out some of the money I have accidentally

come by, and that might just as well be yours, to give you an education, or fit you to be a man worth something, a man fair and square and honest and able to hold your own in the world and to help other people. Now I have told it all out, not a bit as I meant to, and I want to know if you understand and will talk about it."

Poor Ted! he didn't understand. He only knew that this handsome, earnest-faced boy beside him had said strange things about money, which Ted knew were n't true, but that he had spoken so kindly, oh, so kindly! Ted wished he would n't speak so; it made lumps and things in his throat. What did he mean when he said he had n't a right to his money? Who should have money if not John Holland, with his golden hair and friendly smile? And why should he, Ted, have any money — nothing but a bootblack and paper boy, a real bad little boy at that? He had n't any right to any money or anything! Of course not!

"But where's the part about my helping you? I did n't see into that."

"I'll tell you just how; and it makes me ashamed too. I have too much money to spend, and I don't seem to have good sense. I don't act

so well as I know how. I get all taken up with foolishness and I've been thinking it over lots and lots, Ted; the next thing I know it will be badness. I just seem to fairly take to no-account fellows that will have me smoking and wasting all my time over cards and theaters, and, for all I know, though I don't see how I could be such a fool, drinking and all that. Now, Ted, that's awful; you can see it yourself. I can see it now I've got to thinking about it. I've got a chance, and I ought to make a man of myself; now ought n't I? a real man, the only right kind. And I can't take it for granted I'll be that kind whether or no. I may miss it altogether if I don't watch out. And now here's your part: if you'll let me help you, be your brother, I shall have to spend some money on you and I won't have so much left to make a fool of myself with. But more than that, if you will let me care for you, — I would care an awful lot; I can feel it already, — I would have something to think of to make a man of me. I would n't begin smoking cigarettes to be smart, because I would think, 'No; now, there's Ted: I don't want him to smoke for fear it will hurt him, and I won't myself.' I would n't waste my time always for I would think, 'No;

now, there's Ted; you want to be a good fellow all the way through to help Ted, and so that he can respect you and love you.' Don't you see, Ted, how good it would be for me too?"

Poor Ted! All the baseballs in the world seemed to be lumped together in his throat. How could he talk so to him — Ted — how could he?

John got up abruptly to go for bait, afraid he had said too much — Ted was such a little boy!

As Ted heard the sticks and leaves crack and rustle under the departing feet he rolled over on his face on the ground and sobbed and cried. Oh, he was so miserable! How could anybody talk to him that way! What should he do, crying? The steps returned. Ted wished he were dead and buried.

"Why, Ted, old boy, what's the matter?" John tried to turn him over with his foot, but as Ted seemed to be fairly magnetized to the earth, he stooped down beside the little fellow. "There, Ted, brace up! what's the matter?"

"Oh, I wish t' I was dead," groaned Ted. "How c-c-could you say such things to m-m-e" —

"What do you mean, Ted? I did n't mean to hurt your feelings!"

"You said b-brother and l-l-love you—oh, I feel so bad!"

"You need n't love me if you don't want to."

That was pure malice on John's part, and he did feel half ashamed of himself.

"I do—do love you. I'd d-d-die fer you! I don't like—such—talk!"

"All right, sir. You are the boy for me, and I'm the boy for you. We will look after each other. I'll help you and you'll help me. And mind you this, sir: if you don't turn out well, it will be my fault and I shall die of mortification; and if I don't turn out well, it will be entirely your fault; so you must make up your mind to look out for me sharp. No shirking!"

Ted sat bolt upright, eyes wide open, looking at John in a sort of horror.

"Do you mean all that?"

"Honest, sure! Shake hands on it! No backing out."

Ted extended his grubby hand and performed the ceremony as though it were to be his last act on earth.

"Now," said John, drawing a deep breath of relief, "haul up your line and bait your hook and we'll go on fishing."

CHAPTER X.

TO MAKE A LIVING.

O MARCH, why won't you go? It won't be any fun without you!"

"Don't be foolish, John. To tell the truth, fishing is one thing I never cared much about. We have got you up a jolly good lunch — made me hungry to see it."

"But what are you going to do? You will go on with that modeling, I know, and I won't be here. I don't want to go if you are going to do that!"

"I'm not. I'll take this chance to drive down for Nellie Starr. I never took much interest in her, but after your advocacy of her cause I thought I would invite her up for the day."

That plan somewhat reconciled John to a separation in the day's pursuits. Rod and Charlie Harper were coming to go fishing, and Ted was to display his recently acquired skill.

After the boys had all started off with their rods and lunches, and had called out their last laughing good-bys, Bess had been so agonized at

the thought of remaining at home, when other people were going somewhere, that March had sent her down to the tollgate an hour earlier than usual.

Then March took the phaëton and the pony and drove down for Nellie Starr. She had never been interested in the girl. Her meager attainments and scant personal attractions had caused March to rather avoid her. Now she thought of her unquestionably sweet smile, of her shy deference, of her self-forgetfulness and helpfulness, of her loving ways with her little brother, whom John said she wanted to educate, of her desire to "do something," which in itself would have interested March had she only known about it; and by the time she drove up to the modest little house she felt as though it were a real pleasure to think of having Nellie spend the day with her.

A pale, sad-looking woman came to the door.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Starr! Where's Nellie? I drove down to see if I could n't persuade her to come home with me and spend the day."

Mrs. Starr's face brightened as if by magic.

"Oh, I would be so glad to have her go with you! The fact is," lowering her voice, "Nellie tries to take so much care off my shoulders and

does so much for Paul and worries so about things that I am afraid she hurts herself. She does n't look well and she does n't have enough things to cheer her up. Nellie dear, here is March!" she called.

Nellie came running downstairs, her face flushing with pleasure. She admired Mrs. Pomeroy and March intensely. They seemed to be so different from other people, so unaffected by the little ups and downs that disturbed everybody else; and then they seemed to know so much and to be in touch with people and things unknown to Wellsburgians in general.

"Come home with me for the day, will you, Nellie? John has gone off fishing, and you and I can have a nice, sociable time. And you must come anyway, for mamma gave orders for a lunch especially for you—something you liked when you used to come up and play with me—so you must come," conclusively.

"But mamma," hesitated Nellie. "I can't leave mamma all day!"

"Yes, you can, dear, and you shall," put in Mrs. Starr. "I shall have a very happy day—Paul and I—if I can only think you are enjoying yourself."

So the discussion ended in the girls' going up to Nellie's room while she arrayed herself for her outing.

"It was the queerest thing," said March afterward to John. "As soon as we reached her room, and I took in the general arrangement—all sorts of things that showed what she had been trying to do and every one of them done so badly—I began to feel real interested. She had some stuff on the bed—pretty stuff too—that she was trying to make a dress of. She did n't say anything about it, and I knew why. It made me ashamed, because ordinarily what she thought would have been true. She thought I hated any such thing, and would despise her foolishness, for she is always in a quandary, and that it would spoil the day to begin with. I asked her how she meant to make her dress, and she told me the hardest and homeliest sort of a way. I remarked how hard that way was, and asked if she thought she could do it. She admitted that she was afraid she would make a botch of it and then have to wear it anyway, as she had done in so many other instances. While she was dressing I made a sketch of her in the sort of a dress I thought would be really becoming, and, do you know, she

was so delighted I was afraid the tears were in her eyes. I did make her a little better looking than nature. She means to make her dress that way, and I know she will look better in it than she ever did before."

When March undertook to do anything she spared no pains, and now that she had determined that Nellie Starr should have a pleasant day she made every effort to that end. And to her surprise, the more she tried the more she enjoyed it herself and the more she liked Nellie.

They were comfortably settled in the workshop talking about indifferent things as they had all day, when March asked abruptly:—

"What are you going to do with yourself, Nellie? You are n't like the other girls, satisfied just to sit still with no idea of really doing something."

"I wish I knew. I think and think about it. I want to do something, not only because I like the idea, but because I want to earn money. We have so little money that as Paul grows up there won't be enough to educate him, and now mamma does n't have half the nice things she just ought to have and would enjoy; and I want to earn some money."

"What ways have you thought of?"

"Why," said Nellie, blushing furiously, "I only seem to think of things a smart girl can do — a girl who could do anything well. You know the general run — a girl who could play or sing well, or paint well, or knew enough to be wanted as a teacher, or could write, perhaps," deprecatingly. "And then I have thought of all sorts of other things — stenography and typewriting, yes, and clerking and taking in sewing and putting up jam — that's the thing you read about now for a penniless widow to do — and — and going out as child's nurse, and taking in fine ironing" — tragically, while March laughed at the expression on Nellie's face until she was tired.

"I had n't any notion you could be so funny."

"It would n't be funny to everybody," mournfully; but she laughed too, and felt better for it.

"And what did you think was the matter with some of these things?"

"I sometimes wonder if anything is the matter with them — except just my inefficiency. Say clerking. The very thought of that reduces mother to tears. Mamma thinks I am not strong enough, and she could n't bear the thought of being alone all day unless it should be absolutely and

positively necessary ; and of course I know it is n't absolutely and positively necessary yet. And that objection will apply to nearly everything except taking in sewing and ironing, and in this little town nobody wants such things done. Mary Dempster can keep up with all the plain sewing, and she needs it far more than I do."

"How about the stenography and typewriting?"

"Well, I have worked on the stenography, but I know it is no use. It would take me longer than anybody else in the world, I guess, to learn much about it, and then I never would be a good stenographer. If I could take a hundred and twenty words a minute by myself, the instant I should begin to try for any one else I would lose my head completely. Nobody knows how upset I get as soon as I am looked at or placed in a position where I must act, and that at once. I have fought against it so ! It's no use : I never could earn my salt being one of those things. It does seem as though I was just cut out to stay home and pet mother and wash Paul and worry."

March laughed again ; there was no use trying not to.

"Don't laugh, March. Tell me honestly what you think about it. If I can't do anything, why

do I want to so much? If I can't do anything, why is it so necessary that I should? I don't really believe I can't do anything. I believe if I were a boy I should have to do something, and I want to have to do something as it is, no matter how much it plagues me. What do you think, March?"

"I think you are delightful; and the most sensible girl I know. I should n't be able to think of anything myself in your shoes. But this is the truth. As long as you want to do something you will find the thing to do. I'll help you, see if I don't. Of course you ought to be at home. You would die away from your mother and Paul, and how they would exist without you nobody knows. But I say it is a shame that one should work and fuss all day long and not have any money return for it. It is all well enough to talk about love and duty and this and that and the other, but in our day work that is worth while has a money value. And yours shall have a money value; don't you worry, my dear."

Nellie Starr was older than March by three years, but she had a most childlike confidence in the worldly wisdom of the juvenile March.

As it grew cool and pleasant in the afternoon

they took a stroll through the grounds — through desultory little walks and paths that it was March's pleasure to have left untrimmed and nearly uncared for — among the fine large maples and the cedar trees and the sweet-smelling pines, among the bushes of many a year's growth, among the clumps of rose bushes that seemed to spread themselves where they would, unchecked among all sorts of flowers, that it suited March to have come up in unexpected places and in great masses by themselves.

"I think it is just lovely," sighed Nellie. "I do think the world of flowers; they always seem alive to me. I would like to take time to put every inch of our little ground into flowers. I do manage to have some flowers and they grow so well! They are indoor plants, too. I get along splendidly with them."

"Yes, I know; that great tub of ferns you had — I liked those better than anything else."

They seated themselves in a couple of hammocks hanging invitingly under the trees. A French book was in the one Nellie sat in. She picked it up.

"Were you reading this, March?"

An assenting nod.

"Oh, dear! why are some girls made so smart? I couldn't think of sitting down and reading French for pleasure."

"Oh, yes, you could, if you chose to. Tell me about Paul."

Nellie became quite animated at the mention of Paul, and began to tell how bright he was, and how proud of his first trowsers, donned a week since, and how quick he was with books, how affectionate and thoughtful—in fact there never was another little boy so surprisingly nice as Paul.

March formerly would have considered that "Nellie Starr's sort of talk," but now she found it interesting.

Nellie asked her a question and March did not answer, apparently not hearing. "There, now, I've bored you to death as usual," said Nellie despairingly. "I knew I should."

"What? Oh! beg your pardon. I'm getting an idea, Nellie, just a good one; and I have been very much interested about Paul. What was that he did last year when he ran away?"

And Nellie, quite reassured, launched forth into a long tale of the chief adventure of their whole lives.

March gave sufficient heed to be able to make an occasional remark, and went on with her idea—for, against; how? when? why? why not? yes, no; too simple to be true; just the thing; wouldn't pay; yes, it would; a fair living in it; no harm to try.

"I believe I have hit it, Nellie!" she cried enthusiastically. "Now don't be disappointed when I start in, and do make up your mind to give my plan a fair consideration. After I tell you, we'll go up and talk with mamma. I can see her on the veranda now. I think it is jolly. I read about something of the kind lately, and it has been tried very successfully, so you needn't think it is crazy. Now, I'll tell you;" and March sat up and leaned forward from her hammock, while Nellie assumed a like position in hers.

"You must turn all the land you have into a flower garden."

Nellie's face brightened at the mention of the garden, and then straightway fell at the thought of the uselessness of it.

"Turn it into a practical, economic, scientific flower garden. The detail of this I can't talk about at all now, but I shall be able to as soon as I look it up. Don't laugh if I say unseasonable

things and name foolish flowers, but I only mean to illustrate. Put that brick wall of yours all into wall plants, sweet peas, and such things; make a specialty of pansies. Put another place all into pinks; grow yards of borders of mignonette and sweet alyssum."

"People here all grow their own flowers or don't use any," said Nellie hesitatingly.

"Yes, of course. Put Wellsburg out of your head. Your trade is to be with Wheeling entirely."

The astonishment on Nellie's face was laughable.

March availed herself of the opportunity to laugh. "The morning train all summer long, or night train—we will find out all the science of these things—will carry each day a goodly load from your garden to Wheeling flower men. I can't mention half the popular things you must be well stocked with. Even now I think you can have enough of a start to earn sufficient money to buy glass frames and tools and roots and seeds and magazines for next year."

"It is late now," said Nellie, "and I have n't much of anything started—not on a selling basis, at any rate."

“Yes, of course it is late ; and it may turn out that nothing much can be done this year, and perhaps in the end that will be all the better. You can just give up worrying and consider the thing settled — if you go into it, I mean — and be reading and planning and scheming how to get the best start next year. Why, it will be splendid ! you will be at home ; you will be engaged in the healthiest occupation possible ; there will be room for all manner of improvements, and there is every probability that you can make a money success of it ! Come on to mother.”

They joined Mrs. Pomeroy on the veranda and she was sufficiently well versed in reading her daughter’s expressive countenance to detect something new and perhaps dangerous. Nellie looked both eager and apprehensive. New paths had a sort of fascinating horror for her.

March very promptly explained to her mother the turn things had taken. “And, mamma, you know they have a fine piece of land there, just exactly the thing, and it can’t be sold and is n’t any good to them for anything else, and Nellie dotes on flowers. Now just think, even now she could work on violets ; violets are splendid sellers. They grow late, and she can find out how to care

for them. Why, late in the season she can sell them herself for two cents apiece. And dahlias; perhaps there will be some way that she can still catch up on dahlias and chrysanthemums. I think even this year she could do a little something; and, Nellie, think of the fun of planning all winter about it and choosing just what you will have, and how early you will start, and what part of your ground you will have for what — everything! There, now, we came up to talk with you, mamma, and I am doing it all, same as ever!”

The new plan impressed Mrs. Pomeroy very favorably. A great many things occurred to her relative to Nellie’s success with flowers, and also things that she knew about the flower trade.

“It would not be necessary to sink much capital, and I certainly think the plan would be well worth your trying, Nellie,” she said, looking at the girl thoughtfully.

The plan had been growing in charm to Nellie’s mind, and Mrs. Pomeroy’s decision was received with a glow of pleasure. She would have been sadly disappointed if it had met with doubt or disapproval.

Hope, a real, lifelike, well-fed, muscular hope sprang up within her, and life assumed a vastly

different complexion. As a matter of fact she had no more money, no more clothes, no more anything than she had had half an hour ago, but everything seemed different. Nothing seemed hard and unyielding and fateful and tyrannical now. She knew that this elation would be merely temporary, but she knew also that if she continued to believe in this plan as a probable success she would feel strong and cheerful and relieved about her mother and Paul. How smart March was! how fortunate she was to know March! how lovely and kind and wonderful Mrs. Pomeroy was! And she wondered if that John was n't at the bottom of it all anyway; he had looked so interested and sympathetic and boyishly beautiful when she talked so much to him, and he had said March could surely help her. Well, she would always love that boy anyway if he was at the bottom of it.

March in all the excitement of the new plan had rushed to her workshop and now appeared with magazines and flower annuals and newspaper clippings galore. "Here, Nellie, take these home. I know you are wild to go home now, and I am going to drive you in, and I'll be in town to-morrow to talk with you and your mother about it."

That night while John and March were sitting out on the veranda and Mrs. Pomeroy was playing softly on the piano inside, March gave a glowing account of the day's adventures. "And you are such a darling, John! Now, of my own accord, I never should have discovered how nice and even interesting Nellie Starr is!"

CHAPTER XI.

MEASLES, NOT REFORM.

WHAT will I do with Ted? I don't know how to find a school for him. He says he will go to school, though he knows he won't like to study; and I know he won't either, poor little sinner!"

John gave a sigh of sympathy. He thought Ted was so nice that he ought to be put in a position to have a holiday all the year round.

"I have been looking up schools," said March, "and I have picked out three that I think would suit you; but one seems to be better than the others."

"Well, did I ever! Aunt Pomeroy, if March were anybody else, don't you know she would be called officious?" But he looked so admiringly at March that she forgave him.

It was a rainy morning and they were all in the library. March went after her school information, and when she returned the schools were straight-way discussed.

"But first and foremost," said John, "the

schools won't open until September; and what shall I do with Ted until then?"

"Why not leave him where he is?" said Mrs. Pomeroy. "He is improving steadily under Mrs. Dixon's cooking, and he seems perfectly contented."

"Why, if he could stay there, that would end it; but I didn't know he could. He just must work more."

"Yes; let him know he is working for his board; it won't hurt him any. What about your schools, March?"

"One is a military school, and one is a home school for little boys — especial attention given to backward boys. The one I like best is a school where they teach trades as well. The boys only study half a day and work half a day, and if Ted is n't going to take to books that would be a great advantage, and perhaps he wouldn't be so restless. You know being in school will be pretty hard for such a little savage as Ted."

"Be more complimentary — Ted is a gentleman. What are the trades?"

"Book-binding, printing, and joining."

"What are the terms?"

"The cheapest of the three — three hundred a year."

"Grachuz! the school I went to cost a thousand a year!"

"The extra seven hundred was paid for the extra chance of being ruined."

"Now, March," reproachfully, "remember your worthy uncle was at the bottom of that deal. What is the chief binder, printer, and joiner's name?"

"Dr. Logan."

"Doctor! what sort of a doctor?"

"Physician; that is another good point, and especial attention is given to physical development."

"Aunt Pomeroy, why did n't Uncle Chester come and consult March before he sent me to school? I might have known a lot by this time! How large a school is it?"

"There are sixty boys and three assistant instructors."

"Don't see how they keep up the trades and all that for just sixty boys, at three hundred a year."

"Perhaps he has some way of doing it. Perhaps he makes something from their work."

"Have you written to him?"

"No; but I will if you would like to have me."

"Of course I'd like to have you! I have already imagined Ted graduating from that institution, carrying off the printer's salutatory, the joiner's valedictory, and a huge binder's medal, and at the same time able to read and write and say the multiplication table."

"I don't believe one boy can take more than one trade."

"Oh, very likely. I will keep Ted there so long that he can learn all three. Perhaps they will introduce shoemaking and dressmaking before he is gray—and cooking. I already see him a Delmonico or a Worth."

However, Dr. Logan's school was the school picked out for Ted. The doctor's answer to March's letter pleased all the parties concerned, and, though it was so long beforehand he was almost ashamed to speak of it, John began to plan to himself what clothes Ted should have and what should be bought him for the school.

Ted was, on the whole, pleased with the novel prospect of going away with a trunk to school where there were other boys, but he would have been better satisfied yet to have stayed with the

Dixons and "farmed." He was mightily shaken in his small soul between his desire to be just like John and just like Mr. Dixon. At the Dixons' he took great pains to rather stump in his walk, hold his head down, and speak in a loud, not particularly attractive, voice. At the Pomeroy's he tried to hold himself straight and carry his head as John did and walk easily and firmly and speak in a pleasant, modulated voice. He was conscious of preferring Mr. Dixon's style — it was easier to copy — and felt fine in the performance; but he would have been enraged had any one suggested that a being could possibly have been nearer perfection in any way than John.

"Ted," said John one day, "when did your mother die?"

"Don't remember."

"When did your father die? did you tell me?"

"When I was six or seven." Then Ted hung his head and acted embarrassed. "Oh — I — ah — why — I always said he was dead — but he ain't, fur's I know. He was *sent up!*"

John looked at him in astonishment.

"Is it goin' to make any difference?" and Ted squared round with a flash in his eyes. "I'd no

notion of lyin' to you. I can go straight back to the city to-day."

"Bless your heart, Ted!" and John clapped him reassuringly on the back. "I was just surprised, that was all. What I started to ask you, and what I mean to ask now, was nothing but this: and be sure you say what you want about it — don't think of anything except just what you would think nice. I am just as fond of you as I can be, Ted, and I meant what I said when I said I wanted you for my little brother, and want you to want me for your big brother, and would you mind going to school as Ted Holland? Take my name, and then we would be more like brothers with the same name."

So lofty and reverential was Ted's hero worship that the proposition seemed to him like sacrilege. He — just a bad, dirty little boy until lately — named Holland! with the same name as this wonderful big boy, who was so beautiful and rich and splendid! But he had to say something.

"Oh, I'd like it — you know," he stammered. "Only it seems so awful fer *me* to be named same as *you*. Makes me ashamed!"

"No; it won't make you ashamed," said John, conscious of his meanness in pretending to mis-

understand. "Holland is a good name, and I mean to try not to disgrace you if you take it." Then as Ted made a hopeless, gulping sound he added more seriously: "That is just what is nice about it, that we should have the same name. I'm not afraid of your having my name. I shouldn't be surprised if you should be the one to honor the name more than I. We can both try."

And a great resolve rose in the small boy's heart to be such a Holland that he would honor the name; and, though he could not have put the thought into words, he took the name then as his shield from what was wrong and dishonorable, and as a banner to protect with his life, if needs be.

John was so thoroughly interested in Ted that he wanted to be sure everybody thought well of him, "everybody" finally narrowing down to Mrs. Pomeroy and March.

"March, do you really like Ted?"

"Just dote on him! I think Ted is the nicest little boy I ever saw."

"Do you think, take him altogether, he is as nice as Bess?"

"I think he is so much nicer there is n't much

comparison. You see, Ted is a lovable sort of a child ; Bess is n't. Bess would attract more attention in ten minutes than Ted would in a week, but it would be by reason of her least admirable qualities. Ted seems to have a heart in him ; I honestly don't believe Bess has ; she is as callous as she can be. She never has been very badly treated, and yet she didn't care one particle about leaving all the people she has ever known. She likes it here and prefers it, but if any one could come along and offer her more inducements she would leave without a regret. She regards me as a convenience, created for her benefit, in some way bound to see that she has nice clothes and a pleasant time. She has learned to behave well for me — that is part of her adaptability. It is only skin-deep. She would do exactly what suited her best if she had a chance, without any regard for what she is taught now. She thinks she owns the earth, and I don't believe anything will ever take it out of her. That thing she said the other morning is just like her."

"What?"

"She said, 'I don't want none of them things,' and I said, 'I don't want *any* of *those* things.'"

‘Beg your pardon,’ she said, with her chin in the air, ‘*everybody* says *them* things.’”

John laughed.

“I think you are too hard on her, March.”

“That way, do you think? I always say she is the best child I ever saw, so good-tempered and self-helpful and truthful and cheerful; but I think those other things are true.”

“Now I think she is just as loyal to you as she can be. When you had given her a real scolding for something and punished her, I heard her bragging about you to Ted just as soon as she was let off. I can just hear her decisive little voice: ‘*She* knows how to manage me, and she don’t let things go either; she takes care of me and makes me a good girl!’”

“Yes; she says such things to me again and again, and it sounds real pathetic to tell, but I don’t think there is anything to it — just words. She dotes on hearing herself talk.”

March had done a deal of thinking on that subject. She had had dreams before Bess came of winning the child’s love, of being her ideal, of being able to win her and control her by her love for herself. As it was, she now had the child in perfect control and had every reason to be satis-

fied with her marked improvement in so short a time ; but these other elements, the elements of beauty in their relation to each other, seemed to be wholly lacking. She often rocked and petted Bess, and Bess enjoyed it hugely. She loved to be made much of, and she had the outward appearances of an affectionate disposition — would take March's hand and surreptitiously kiss it, and make her presents, and tell her every day how much she loved her — but to March it was all nothingness. Now Ted, she — anybody — could see how Ted fairly worshiped John ; that all John's doings and sayings were to him perfection ; that he was satisfied with any word or attention to himself. Ted had a heart worth something — anybody could see that. But March was just as sure Bess had n't any worth mentioning ; and that was the general opinion. March was not foolish about it. She was not discouraged because she thought that Bess did not feel a pronounced affection for herself, but she felt discouraged because she thought there was no hope of winning any such affection, there being nothing of the kind to win.

That very same evening Bess was so subdued and quiet, and stayed so unobtrusively near her

that March felt some compunctions. The next morning Bess did not look well even to March's inexperienced eyes. March and John walked down to the tollgate to say that Bess would not be there that morning, and discovered that the little tollgate boy was "all out with measles."

"Well, there! that's what's the matter with Bess — measles!" laughed March. "Have you had them, John?"

"Yes; long ago."

"And I thought I had discovered some indications of a heart last night — and it was measles!"

Bess did have the measles, but it was no joke. The doctor said he had never seen but one child so sick with the measles. It looked at one time like a fight for life.

Mrs. Pomeroy's heart misgave her. It did seem as though she could not allow March to work and watch over that little delirious sick child night and day. March grew pale and tired-looking, but so beautiful! The night when Bess was in a really serious condition March went out on the veranda while her mother and the woman they had there to help took care of the little girl; and John went out with some fresh iced lemonade and some fruit and fans and the easiest cushions.

The tears came to the boy's eyes, she looked so beautiful to him.

"O March," he murmured, "you are so beautiful! you are so beautiful! And you look so tired!"

"Well, I'm not very tired," she said with a natural, easy laugh. "I must be pretty poor stuff after all; here it is only two weeks and I have done mighty little. Best lemonade I ever tasted."

"I was afraid you would feel all cut up," hesitated John, "after the doctor said Bess was in such a bad way to-night."

"Don't you mind that doctor," was the almost sharp answer. "Bess is all right. She will be better to-morrow as sure as my name is Marjoribanks Pomeroy! Poor baby! John, she's been so sick! You know I never saw any one sick before. I doubt if I ever half believed in sickness. But she has been so sick! and only the measles too."

John was silent, sitting near March and fairly drinking in the beauty of her face, for he was a worshiper of the beautiful if there ever was one.

"I can tell you, John, I am going to be good to that little thing after this. I didn't begin to realize before. Talk about her being callous;

I must be adamant! Poor little thing! Why should people be so afraid of loving? Loving is the only really beautiful, satisfying thing there is; I know it, I feel it, I am sure of it. O John! now while I do know it, and do feel it, and can say the words, do let me say it — what I have been thinking these two weeks, nights, in there: keep your heart loving something all the time, let it grow more loving and with greater capacity for loving every day. Love the best, purest, truest way. There won't be room for what will belittle and contract and narrow and make mean, if the heart is full of the best love always."

John could n't say anything. Those words seemed to mean a great deal to him — more than just the words could mean of themselves. It seemed as though everything but the best must go away forever; as though he never could think anything but the best, or care for anything but the best now; and his heart was full of a real, earnest, heartfelt prayer, such as is not possible to one very often, that he might be true and honorable, and that his heart might be full of the best and purest and truest love always.

Those two weeks had been a great lesson to March. Bessie's constant stream of delirious talk

had opened her eyes. She began to understand more about the child.

It was a pitiful thing to see Bess lying there on the bed, so small and childish, and then hear her ravings: "I'm afraid! Now he 's coming in! Oh, but he 's so drunk! I'm afraid! I'm afraid! Nance, don't leave me! Nance, I'll do just what you say; don't leave me! Yes; I'll do anything. Now for the dance hall! Oh, I'm afraid! I'm afraid!"

"This is better. What a fine house! Oh, what beautiful clothes! I must be a queen! These people shall all wait on me. People don't love bad little girls, and I'm so bad! I don't care! no; I don't care! I don't care! I don't care! Who are you, anyway—a little no-account child—talking so to me? I don't care! I don't care! Oh, but she is pretty and she has sweet-smelling clothes. Nobody can love bad little girls—nobody but Jesus. He loves 'em all the time, she says. Now people are coming. Golly, I'm glad! whole lot of people! I'll be sent to bed. If I'd act right, I would have a good time. Well, I'd rather act bad, I guess. People don't love bad little girls. I don't care! I don't care! Now I'm so good! She's so pretty; she has nice

things! Why don't you act well now you have a chance? Get your scrubbing brush! She has soft, sweet lips. But they don't love my lips! Who cares? I don't! I have fine clothes and live in a fine house! who cares! But good little girls are loved by everybody. And she is so pretty, and has soft fingers. Oh, I'm afraid! I'm afraid! Yes; I'll be bad, if you like! I'll do just what you say! I'm so tired!"

And so it went on day and night; and when Bess was conscious she smiled so pleasantly and said in her weak, trembling little voice that nobody need wait on *her*, she could get up and do her work, and then drop off into delirious talk again.

March had never known what pity was before. Bess was just as sharp and shrewd while sick as when well, however. Her aggravating way of hitting the nail on the head did not fail her. When March smoothed her head and gently gave her cooling drinks, Bess said calmly:—

"You love me when I'm sick, don't you? Bess can't be so very bad, then. Wait until I get well and you won't need to bother so, will you?"

Bess seemed to acquire a fuller realization of the state of things as well as March. As she

grew better, and she convalesced very rapidly, she watched March do all sorts of things to amuse her and make her comfortable, and that too when March seemed tired, and it dawned over her that this was gratuitous — done for her because March cared for her and chose to please her, and not through obligation ; and she noticed how March brightened and seemed pleased when she thought she, Bess, appreciated things and really cared because some one had tried hard to help her.

And after all March felt better about Bess, and more loving toward her, and more patient with her. And Bess felt more as though she belonged to March, and as though she wanted to see her and wanted to be with her, and could not do without her, than either of them had dreamed of before the episode of the measles.

CHAPTER XII.

HER MODEL.

MARCH was undeniably nervous. She walked restlessly in and out of the workshop and circulated around a table in the middle of the floor, eying with every variety of expression the object placed conspicuously upon it. This object was wrapped in cloths.

John seemed even more excited than March. He whistled, he whittled, he sang snatches of songs, he snapped his watch, he pulled out and replaced books, but above all he stared — speculatively, anxiously, cheerfully, proudly, and from every point of the compass — at the swathed object on the table.

“He’ll be here in half an hour, March.”

March nodded, but said nothing.

“I don’t know why we should be so stirred up about it,” continued John.

“I don’t believe I am.”

“Ho!” and John laughed his incredulity. “Suppose he doesn’t like it, that won’t make any difference.”

"No-o-o. I don't suppose it will."

"But suppose he does like it, March, what difference can that make?"

"I — don't — know."

But they both felt it would make a difference. March had worked on her Little Scrubber model until she thought she could do no more to it. It was certainly the best thing she had ever modeled. She was sixteen. Though so young, Mrs. Pomeroy could not help feeling that she was old enough to make a decision that would influence her whole future if she chose to do so. March, in long talks with her mother, — conclaves to which John had finally been cordially admitted, — had urged that if she meant to be a sculptor, as she did, she ought to lose no more years. Now was the time to begin work in earnest, if ever. How should she so begin? Where should she go? What instructors should she have? What should she do, and how should she do it?

Mrs. Pomeroy had a friend in Cincinnati who had risen to eminence as a sculptor, and whose opinion was of great weight on all art subjects. She had not seen him for years, but they had occasionally corresponded. She wrote to him of her

daughter — of what seemed to be the girl's natural bent, and of her wishes. He asked if she had ever tried modeling, and Mrs. Pomeroy replied that she had. Mr. Colfax then wrote that he would enjoy coming to Wellsburg for a day or so, and they could consult better when he had seen something of the young lady's style.

And on this day he was to come.

Bess was watching for the carriage, and had already given two false alarms. Now in the shop they could hear her voice. "I *know* this is Mr. Flaxseed! I know it! I know it!" and shortly the wheels creaked on the gravel. The carriage stopped at the veranda, the mighty man alighted, and was greeted warmly by his old friend Mrs. Pomeroy.

"Now will come the iced tea, and then he will go to his room, and then, presumably, he will descend to the veranda again," said March in the shop to John, speaking as though rehearsing a murder scene in a play.

All of which things came to pass, and when Mr. Colfax again stepped out on the fresh, shady veranda, he was met by a girl and a boy, both of a very astonishing appearance. While gazing with admiration at March as he shook hands with

her, he failed to catch John's name and said in a puzzled way, "Well, I never dreamed you had a son too," which so pleased the group that the ice was broken at once.

Mr. Colfax was not a very terrifying man. He was not an artistic looking man. He was short and stout and of a genial countenance; not at all like a traditional artist.

John liked him at once, while March wondered privately if he really were the great sculptor.

"So you are thinking of sculpture," he turned to March abruptly. "Women don't often go into that, do they? And you are n't through playing with dolls yet, are you?"

"No, sir," she said equably.

"Do you think you could work?"

"Certainly."

"You have tried modeling to some extent, your mother writes me."

"Only to a very slight extent, of course."

"Well, my boy, what do you think of it?" he turned good-humoredly to John. "Can she make marbles?"

"You had better wait until you see some of her work," said John promptly. "You won't see any room for joking then!"

"That's right, that's right," said Mr. Colfax; "but we must get acquainted."

Doting parents had frequently asked his opinion on their offsprings' wretched efforts in clay, and he had no faith whatever in the probability of March, at her age, being able to do anything — if she ever would be able to.

The thought of seeing Mrs. Pomeroy had been pleasing to him, and something in her letter had impressed him in spite of himself. Now that he had seen the girl, her girlish beauty had driven everything else out of his head. In his experience the girls who had "done something" were rarely afflicted with anything beyond the average complement of good looks. Pretty girls, he believed, never stuck to anything. After a rather desultory conversation he proposed that he should see some of March's modeling and they all escorted him to the workshop.

"Is he going to see me? Will he know it's me? Will you tell him why I had to scrub?" whispered Bess as she walked behind with March and John.

When they reached the shop Mr. Colfax showed a disposition to look around and amuse himself before he examined the model which he saw at

once as he entered, and March waited quietly by the table to take off the cloths. There was a different expression on his face — altogether different — when he finally said gravely, “Now I am ready, Miss March.”

She took off the cloths and stood there silently, her heart beating a little faster than she found pleasant, while the others gazed on the Little Scrubber.

Nobody said a word. The silence became oppressive.

“You did this yourself, I suppose,” Mr. Colfax said.

March nodded.

“You have had no instruction, I understand.”

“No, sir.”

“Well, we’ll go down if you will, Mrs. Pomeroy. I shall hope to be allowed to come into this room often while I stay.”

Mr. Colfax and Mrs. Pomeroy left the room, while March and John stayed “to wrap up the baby” as John said. John’s eyes shone and he was very elated.

March was relieved ; disgusted that she had expected she did n’t know what ; and satisfied, now that she had made no sensation whatever, that

she could still go on and amount to something; she felt surer of her power and of her ability to do something than ever before. She felt more conscious of something within her that seemed to her to be just simple strength than ever before. For a moment it was as though she could conquer the world.

“Well, John, he did n’t faint after all, did he?” she said with a laugh. “I need n’t have worried. He could see so many villainously bad things about it. I don’t think he gave me credit for what I might do.”

John looked at her curiously. Yes; March seemed sincere.

“Don’t you know what he thought?”

“Very nearly, I am afraid,” with a broad smile. “He wondered what ailed mother, I should imagine.”

John started to say something, but changed his mind. He left her before she was quite through and hurried down to the veranda. He could hear the voice of the sculptor, earnest and decisive, before he could hear the words. Then there came to his ears: “The most surprising evidence of genius! To my knowledge there has been nothing like it these many years! Things

about that model could not have been reached by many except by years of work. Yes, I know she has worked, and will work, but there's genius! May the muses keep her at it! Shut her up, Mrs. Pomeroy. Don't let her out! Don't let her see any men! She is too beautiful! Save her for the cause! the glorious cause! She is a wonder—a genius—a genius of the first water! I never was more astounded in my life! I could n't say a word! And, by the way, that must go down to the exhibition. When it takes the medal it will give her a taste of fame, and whet her appetite for it. Here you, John, shake hands with me. You knew a good thing when you saw it, did n't you? Joke! Boy, I'm completely unnerved!"

John was glad from the bottom of his heart. He had felt that Mr. Colfax had been impressed in exactly that way. But something made things seem very gloomy to him; he vaguely wondered what it was and why, for the words kept saying themselves over to him, "Don't let her see any men! She is too beautiful." It dawned upon him that these pleasant summer days could n't go on forever—these days, the happiest, the best, the most ideally beautiful of his whole life. March

was a genius ; she would go away ; strange things might happen, and at any rate, worse than anything that might happen in the dim future, the certainty of present separation—the knowing that all the jolly talks in the honeysuckle-scented workshop were over ; all the long walks ; all the exhilarating horseback rides when horse and rider seemed one and the breeze kissed their faces and it was a sort of intoxication to be alive ; all the foolish scheming and joking that seemed to begin and end in a laugh ; all the concocting of ice cream down in the cellar ; all the sketching and reading down by the spring house ; all the evenings on the veranda and the long hopes for the future, and the half-told plans, and the wishes to be good and great and the resolves to be of some use—all would go. And March was a genius—why should she care ? She was 'way above him someway. When he would feel all right and satisfied, some remark would suddenly show that she believed in a higher standard than he did, that she knew and thought things every day that he never dreamed of. "It is n't fair," he thought almost bitterly. "She was taught things."

But that did not help the matter any ; it would all be over. He could n't think where he would

go or what he would do. March, March, March! — he could see her face in a thousand ways, laughing, with a gleam of fun in the eyes meant for him alone, and recognizing a good-fellowship between them that was good and sweet past belief; very kindly, when he said something she liked or did something she had not expected, a sort of kindliness that warmed his heart; a disappointed look; a troubled look; one full of mischief; very grave, thinking of things 'way off somewhere; perplexed and expecting him to help her; keen; a bright, eager look of welcome, — oh, why had he watched her face so well! He had wandered off. He had been to the barn and in the horses' stalls, around the hedge, down in the orchard, down the hill to the spring house, in all sorts of places, hardly knowing or caring where he went.

“Why, John, where have you been? I've been all over this place, and it is supper time.” March had hold of both his hands, and was smiling into his face while he smiled back, but not in a very brave way.

“What's the matter? Do you know Mr. Colfax liked that thing after all? Wasn't that funny! We have been talking. He is consider-

ably more civil, only I was so uneasy without you. I don't find things much fun unless you are there too. Did you know he liked it?"

"Yes, of course; anybody would but you."

"Politeness! I'm so glad to find you! John, just think! if we go to New York next year — next winter — this winter! I've never been in a city more than a month at a time in my life. Just think!"

"Yes," said John hopelessly. "It will be jolly, but I don't feel very good about it."

"Why not?" stopping aghast. "I thought you wanted to go to the Cooper, or the League, or somewhere" —

"You were n't talking about me, were you?" John stopped too, though they could both hear the supper bell.

"Why not, I'd like to know? We would have the most perfectly gorgeous time — just think of it! And how we would work and plan! and the fun we would have! Uncle Chester, you know, would be dead certain to let you if mother talked to him, and of course she would. O John!"

And to John life was suddenly beatific. He glowed and expanded, and smiled and grew hilarious, and they made the dining room ring that

night, they both felt so ridiculously contented and happy.

Even Bess was overlooked in her most obstreperous remarks, and her training seemed to have suffered a sudden check.

One of the first results from Mr. Colfax's visit was the packing and sending the Little Scrubber by him to Cincinnati to the exhibition. It was too late to enter, but was put in by his influence and as he predicted took the medal. The model made a great talk in Cincinnati; the papers had plenty to say about it, and very impossible things were affirmed about March and her abilities. The truth about her age was pretty generally circulated, which added to the wonder. The papers were all sent to March, and Mrs. Pomeroy and John read them diligently; but March saw fit to feel intensely disgusted over it all.

"Now, why, March, what makes you feel so?" asked John.

"Reason enough, I'm sure! What those papers say would aggravate any one. The whole point seems to be that I am not gray-headed. There is no credit in that sort of praise. Why don't they say such and such a thing is wonderful because the person who did it is deaf and dumb

and blind ! The Little Scrubber is truly wonderful when you consider that the girl who modeled it is a girl of absolutely no ability whatever. Considering that, the execution is truly surprising ! I want to do a thing so well that nobody will think who did it, but only of the thing itself. It must stand on its own feet and be compared with other things of its kind. That miserable thing was full of faults and I know it and everybody else knows it ! and why can't people write sense ! ”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LYING STAGE.

IT seemed to John that if his guardian only would let him go to New York with Mrs. Pomeroy and March, and allow him to begin an art career in earnest, life would be brimful of hope and happiness. How he would work! March was such an indefatigable worker that he would have some ado to keep up with her; but it could be done surely. He would work so hard with black and white! He found himself sitting morning after morning in the workshop looking over files of magazines to see the illustrations, studying the strokes in the pen and ink work as some would study over a translation, whistling softly to himself as he thought he saw through this or that or the other; making some remark to March rather for his own relief than for her edification, as he often did not notice whether she answered or not; dashing off rapid sketches and flinging them aside, and all the time in a fever to hear from his guardian that he might have his will in this matter.

He had written just as urgent a letter as he knew how, in addition to the letters Mrs. Pomeroy and March had sent. He had said everything he could ; he had promised to work hard ; he had urged that he would have so little money left out of his allowance that he could hardly make very much of a fool of himself, and at the end he had pushed his plea to the farthest.

I really do mean to be such a good boy, Uncle Chester ! A boy could n't wish to be anything else, that wanted to be with Mrs. Pomeroy and March. They make a boy feel so almighty different, someway. March is such a genius, and I'll just have to work like fury to keep along at all. And I hate to study, you know I do. I know you have worried a lot about me, though I pretended not to know it, and I am awfully sorry. Don't know how I ever could have been so mean. I just wanted my own way ; and you are the best guardian and kindest and nicest and jolliest — and have the most tiptop relations any boy's guardian ever had. And I think the world of you, and I really believe if you could understand how tremendously virtuous and workative I feel, you would think I would be all right even in such a den of iniquity as New York.

Mr. Pomeroy had been called suddenly to Chicago, and the three Wellsburg letters were

forwarded to him. He read his sister's first and felt a great relief and satisfaction at the turn things had taken. He had entirely given up the idea of sending his ward to college. The boy would simply be ruined, as he was so disinclined to study. He was quite disgusted with his past winter's experience of the effect of boarding-school life. He did not know what to do. Now, though he had no faith in John's predilection for art, and thought it was a whim which would evaporate in good season, the idea of having him nominally occupied and under Mrs. Pomeroy's supervision was most soothing. If John could go to the dogs while living with Mrs. Pomeroy, he was n't worth worrying over. And Mrs. Pomeroy was so warm in the praise of this boy of his! He devoutly hoped she would not feel differently in the course of a year. John might appear a little more unmanageable in a city than out there in the country.

March's letter was a great joke, and he laughed heartily. His brother David's daughter was a paragon. David was the most fortunate man on earth, and he of all men had to die!

Then he opened John's letter. The boy had gradually so wormed himself into his worldly-

minded guardian's heart that the man almost worshiped him. All his hopes were centering around that golden-haired, frank-faced boy. He was ashamed of the feeling almost. He argued against it. But to have John what he should be — honest and manly and honorable — had become his chief ambition ; his fears for this boy had been the bitterest thoughts he had ever known. And now things did seem more as they should be. The last part of John's letter he read and reread, and then put it in his pocket letter case to carry with him always. The boy was too good to be ruined.

He straightway answered all three letters, in great good humor, for he felt that what he was writing would prove most acceptable. His letter to John was the shortest, but it touched the boy more than any letter he had ever received.

I shall be glad to have you in New York with my sister-in-law, if you wish it. I believe all you wrote me. If you weary of your bargain, write to me yourself ; do not let it come to me through Mrs. Pomeroy. You never can know how dear your best success is to my heart.

"Is n't Uncle Chester a brick, though!" said John proudly, as he displayed his letter to Mrs. Pomeroy.

The planning for the New York winter went on from that time with unabated zeal, but March found her schemings varied by plans on Bessie's behalf. Bess had reached what March called the lying stage. March had often said that Bess was the most truthful child she ever saw. Now, though she had improved in every respect, she had developed a taste for lying. She lied in the most honest way, until March was at her wits' end. One evening on the veranda she was discoursing vehemently to her mother and John on the subject of Bessie's newly developed proclivities, when John said thoughtfully:—

“I think you are too hard on her, March. Bess has to walk pretty straight; she has to do more things and in a stricter way than any child I ever saw, and you don't have any mercy. The least wavering from the chalk line on her part is made so much of that it seems as though you must expect her to begin to lie out of things.”

“John Holland!” was the indignant exclamation. March said no more and John went on argumentatively:—

“You can see how it is yourself; she is told to do a lot of things, and something she is sure not to do; then she is asked about it, and knowing

retribution is on her path, she tries to stave it off by lying out of it. You can't have everything, and you get some things at the expense of others."

"John *Holland!*" exclaimed March again.

John was sure he was right, and after waiting for March to say something he said rather triumphantly, "You know it is so yourself, don't you?"

"I should think not!" wrathfully. Then, after a pause: "I would n't take the trouble to defend myself to anybody else, but as long as it is you I will tell you what I think and why I think it. I have thought a great deal about this, and, mamma, I want you to see if you don't agree with me. You must take into consideration Bessie's life — eight years. She has certainly been used to harsh and violent punishments; she has seen lying as a matter of everyday occurrence; she has often been made to lie when it suited some one to have her do so, and she has often resorted to lying as her salvation from blows — successfully, probably, five times out of ten; enough to assure her that the expedient was well worth trying. And of course she never was punished for lying simply because it was lying. Now, add that she happens to be naturally truthful, and add that she

is n't afraid of anything. She came here to find very easy times, as she thought then — no hard work such as she had been accustomed to. No blows, no swearing, no violence, a very land of peace — too peaceful. There was no reason for her not telling the truth about everything. She was not trying to escape anything ; she was not afraid of displeasing or shocking us ; in fact, if she had done anything wrong or shocking, she was inclined to boast of it. She was courageous ; she wanted to dare us ; she felt that she had the upper hand, for some reason ; she was sure we would not hurt her ; she would have enjoyed stirring up a row ; life was too peaceful ; so she did not lie. Isn't that so, mamma ? ”

“ Yes ; I think that is a very correct analysis so far.”

“ I used to think about it a great deal. Of course above all things I wanted her honest and truthful. That is the only hope, I think. I knew then that she was truthful, not because she had any principle about it — she had n't — but because she had no fear. Now I did n't care one particle about that sort of truthfulness — not a particle. She might keep in that way a long time and the first minute it became easier or more de-

sirable for her to lie, she would lie without a qualm. She would have no principle for truth. That must come to an end, but how, I didn't know. Probably mother could have told me. But when the end came I recognized it. Bess has improved; you say so, John; she is more orderly, more polite, more thoughtful, kinder, more anxious to please—that is the point—more anxious to please. For the first time she becomes anxious that people shall think well of her. It is quite a new experience. It is not yet a very strong motive, but strong enough to exert an influence. So when she does not do as she ought, through her carelessness or temporary willfulness, the result conflicts with this desire for approval, and she seeks to remedy matters by a lie. Now that she has a motive, she falls back on her old training and brings back her old expedient. If it works—all right. She cares nothing about the truth as truth. And this is the point I have been hoping for. It must have come some time, and the sooner the better. Now, she can be cured of lying, and she shall be. I mean to put all the brains I have in that one point, and many things are in my favor—her natural truthfulness and **her** newly acquired desire to please. She will

have principle on the subject, and then she can withstand all inducements. I think it is very unfortunate that all her life, before she came here, has made her hard to deal with. I mean that she has been so used to hard times and hard treatment that a strictness that would be too hard for other children seems like a mere nothing to her, and also that, so far, talking does n't have any effect. She has been too accustomed to meaningless talk. She has to have object lessons. Now, John, can you see what I mean?"

"Of course; any fool could. I'm sorry I did n't let you talk first; but I'm sort of ashamed of you — talking so much like a parental guide. It would have been more becoming to you to have been green and unsophisticated and mistaken as I was. But after all I don't believe I shall be convinced until you tell me how you are going to stop her. From all you have said, as far as I can see, any means you propose to take to break her of lying will aggravate the difficulty."

"Not a bit of it. As it is n't natural to her to lie, it can be reduced just as easily as impudence or disorderliness or any such thing, and they all succumbed promptly enough."

"How, now, March?"

“Oh, you know what happened yesterday? She said she had done her sewing when she had n’t. I asked her if she did n’t know that was a lie. Yes, she knew. What did she tell it for? She did n’t know. I informed her that a lie was about the meanest thing on earth, and whatever else I might put up with I would n’t put up with a lie, and whenever she wanted the hardest punishment I could think of she could just tell a lie and get it. Her eyes popped open, and she said: ‘Shucks! that’ll learn me a lesson, if that’s the way it’s going to be!’ Then I told her that I was n’t used to a little girl that lied, and I did n’t know how to punish her, and she could choose her first punishment. Maybe she could devise something that would stop her at once. She said I had better whip her. I told her that I had said again and again that I would n’t whip her because I did n’t believe in whipping children; but as this was such a serious matter, if she really chose a whipping I would see if I could give her one. Well, the little imp was just delighted. She stuck to the whipping, and I whipped, and she appeared to howl and make a great fuss, and I verily believe it was every bit put on. Then a lucky thought occurred to me, and I said I would

wash her tongue. I did, with soap; and she roared — cried genuine, unaffected tears. That's the time *I* was delighted. But all the afternoon you should have heard her. She went off into a perfect gale of laughter every few minutes over her sewing, and I would hear her say, 'Whipped me! such a whipping! how I wanted to laugh! And washed my tongue! soap too! goody me! Was n't it nasty! I don't want any more of *that*! Guess that will learn me not to be so fresh about lying! Sha'n't tell a great many more lies at that rate. Soap!' "

"She told one to-day, did n't she?"

"Yes; and I washed her mouth to-night, and she seemed to hate it more than ever. After she went to bed, with the tears still on her face, she said, 'Well, I guess I'll get it through my head! if lies have to be washed out of you like that, I don't want any more of them!' Of course she will lie some more, but it won't be long before, between punishments and talk, she will understand lying is something very bad; and then she will acquire a principle for truth. Now, mother, don't you believe it?"

"Yes; I certainly do. These are n't methods I should think of beforehand myself, or perhaps

altogether approve of, not knowing the circumstances; but Bess is a very odd child."

"I'm thankful I'm not expected to knuckle down to Ted that way," said John.

"You are awfully fortunate in the way you have known Ted, and in the way you stand to each other. There isn't anybody else in the world could have done for Ted so easily what you have already. I should be thankful enough if Bess cared one tenth for me what Ted does for you."

"Oh! you don't give Bess credit enough; she is devoted to you as it is."

CHAPTER XIV.

SCHOOLS FOR TWO.

IT was the finest September morning when the Pomeroy family made their start for New York. The air was the very elixir of life. The house was practically ready for leaving. Mr. and Mrs. Dixon were to see to closing it after the party had gone; Mary Ann and Molly were going to New York with Mrs. Pomeroy.

March had arranged and rearranged her beloved workshop until at last it seemed in a safe condition to leave for the winter. It seemed almost melancholy to look for the last time at that dear old room, across the wide stretch of landscape, at the grapes ripening on the veranda.

"Would n't it be terrible to leave this place for always?" she said to John.

"Don't you do it!" was the impulsive answer.

The lawn and tennis court and archery ground never looked more inviting; but March thought they already wore a desolate air. The trees and bushes and luxuriant masses of flowers all seemed

to remonstrate with the travelers for their heartless desertion.

Bess, in a most becoming little sailor suit, with her red cheeks and shining eyes, was in a state of uncontrolled exuberance. She rushed from one to the other:—

“Got a clean handkerchief? Did you lock that drawer? Don’t forget your umbrella! What time is it?”

Then she announced with a scream of joy:—
“There comes Mrs. Dixon and Ted, and they’re putting the things in the carriage! Oh, goody, goody! Mrs. Dixon’s crying!”

Mrs. Dixon, poor soul! was in the depth of distress over Ted’s departure. She had wept over all the things John had sent her to pack; she had put surreptitious boxes of cookies and jars of jam and jelly wherever there was room for them among Ted’s things; she had rocked him in her capacious lap that morning, in the great old rocking-chair that stood by the open door; she had wailed over him and kissed him, and admonished him to run right away if they underfed him like she’d heard tell, and come back to her, and she’d fat him up again. She knew his clothes wouldn’t be mended, and that he would be

allowed to catch cold, and would be treated unkindly.

And Ted snuggled up to her and cried too. He doted on being "mothered," as Mrs. Dixon called it, and he couldn't bear to leave her, and he vowed he would come back and be a farmer and take care of her and Uncle Jerry all their lives.

And Mrs. Dixon still continued to diligently wipe her eyes on her apron as she escorted Ted up to the house.

"It's a shame, Master John, to put the little darling off in a lonesome place like that — him as is cut out for a good, honest farmer!"

"Oh, he shall be a farmer," said John cheerily; "and you will be too proud of him for anything; but he must know how to read and write. Think how nice it will be to get a letter from him telling what he is doing!"

That view of the case brightened the appearance of things considerably.

The horses were stamping and pawing at the steps, anxious to be free in that delicious September air. Mr. Dixon had already driven off with the trunks and Mary Ann and Molly. Albert announced that everything was ready; Mrs. Pomeroy had a few last orders about the house for

Mrs. Dixon, and then with many good-bys they drove away down the gravel, out the great stone gateway, then along the driveway to the turnpike. They all looked at the house regretfully except Bess. She had no thoughts but of exhilaration and delight ; something grand surely must be the outcome of so many preparations. She would not have had such a beautiful new dress and such lots of other new clothes if she were not to be a center of attraction somewhere. Leaving the grand old house was nothing to her. She only wished they could leave faster. John and March were full of all the happiness and pleasant anticipations of making a new start — on the way at last toward the goal of fame and success ; but it was a truly melancholy thing not to be going back to the good dinner in the cheerful dining room ; not to have the “jolly racket” in the workshop that afternoon ; not to have the horseback ride and the tennis later ; not to have the quiet evening on the veranda. To Mrs. Pomeroy this was going away from the old place as she had gone again and again until there was no novelty about it. But what was this to mean for March ? Something good surely, as she looked at the bright, beautiful face beside her.

Ted was the most disconsolate one of the party. He seemed to be leaving his only home ; the only place where he had ever had good things to eat and a clean bed to sleep in ; the only place where he was made much of, and had his clothes mended and his cuts bound up and his hair washed ; the only place where he was called all sorts of rash, endearing names, and told he was the best boy in the world and that they could n't live without him. It was terrible to leave Mrs. Dixon. But after all, the swift horses, the easy carriage, the fresh, sunny air, the thought of his trunk and grand new things in it, and the happy consciousness that he was with John and was going to travel with him did much to render life supportable.

The little company were all to go to Philadelphia together. From there, Mrs. Pomeroy, with Mary Ann and Molly, was to go to New York or to Brooklyn, where she had rented a furnished house for the winter. John was to take Ted to Logan Institute, on the outskirts of the city, and stay a day or so in Philadelphia with his guardian, who was to meet him there.

March was going to establish Bess in school in Morristown, a short distance from New York.

Mrs. Pomeroy had proposed that Bess should be in school that winter, as March would be so occupied, and March fell in with the proposal at once. There was no difficulty about the school, as an old friend of Mrs. Pomeroy had been engaged for years in keeping a school for little girls — usually children whose parents were dead or ill or traveling — and they were accommodated irrespective of the ordinary school terms, and were taught much as fortunate children were taught at home, how to do work suitable to their ages as well as how to study.

As Mrs. Pomeroy said, no little girl who was to have the advantage of a scholarly education should ever go there, but for a child like Bess, who was not likely to take to books, the school would be perfection.

Bess herself was much delighted with the plan. New territory was most desirable. March wondered a little nervously what Mrs. Lyon would think of Bess, and if she would be imposed upon by her. She had learned to behave very creditably, and with March was quite a model; but March was convinced that so far this only represented Bessie's adaptability. The girl had discovered what March's standard was and that it

was to her advantage to conform to it ; but March knew that she had no conception that this standard was general ; she would experiment in new surroundings just as she had with March. "Well, a change would be good for her. And if Mrs. Lyon is as shrewd as she is represented to be, she can soon manage Bess now." She thought all this to herself as she went up the steps of the square-built, pleasantly shaded house where Mrs. Lyon lived with her family of little girls.

"Well, Miss March, can this be you! How you have changed from the baby I saw once! Like your mother! Dear child, this is a great pleasure! And this is Bessie? I am sure you won't be lonesome here, Bessie, among so many little girls."

Bess smiled knowingly, cocked her head on one side, and eyed Mrs. Lyon in an unabashed way.

"Measuring her," thought March impatiently. "I wish she was a perfect dragon. It would do the little imp good."

"I have a new trunk," announced Bess.

"Oh, indeed ; it shall stand right in your room. You are to have a room off mine ; a little, wee room, so you won't be lonesome."

"Oh, I'd rather have a big room like I have at home. I would n't be lonesome!"

"See here, Bess," said March decidedly, "you need n't say another word about what you would like; if you are smart, you will like what you can get. You need n't think Mrs. Lyon will put up with nonsense from you any more than I will."

"All right," said Bess cheerfully, and immediately subsided into her best behavior, which consisted in softening and modulating her voice, and appearing about as babyish and little as she looked.

Although March knew this manner was adopted only on special occasions, she always felt relieved when Bess resorted to it, for then she was sure to make a good impression; and her other company manners were too self-conscious and self-assertive for endurance.

They went up to Bessie's room — a "little, wee" room surely — and Bess was greatly pleased with it. March often wondered why it was that the child was always so well satisfied when there was no alternative.

Mrs. Lyon brought in her two nieces, who helped her with her school — stout, good-natured, unintellectual looking girls, who seemed admi-

rably adapted to withstand all the worries incident to so heterogeneous a family. They were exceedingly cordial to Bess, and she began to expand dangerously.

"How many servants you got in this house?"

"A very great many — more than you could count," put in Mrs. Lyon gravely. "You will have nine servants and ten underservants."

"My golly!" exclaimed Bess, with an unprecedented relapse to old-time custom; "and *you* 've only got Mary Ann and Molly!" turning to March.

"Got a lot of horses and carriages, have you?"

"Now, Bess, just stop at once," said March. "Try to remember some of the things you promised me if I would let you come to school."

They went out to the playground and there were nine little girls — some swinging, two playing croquet, some with their dolls, and one child was sewing.

At the sight of the children Bess became suddenly and unaffectedly embarrassed. March had never seen anything like it in her before. She hung behind March and would not raise her head.

"I do wonder if children won't have a good

effect on her," thought March. "Just the thing, I do believe!"

But her foresight showed her pictures of Bess recovering from her first impressions and ruling everything as was her wont. She thought of the poor little tollgate boy, who could not call his soul his own, and who was instructed in every move of a game: "Now you must say so and so; now you must come to me and ask this and this." She devoutly hoped that there was a well-developed bully among those innocent-looking little girls who would so demonstrate to Bess the evils of her way that domineering would cease to seem so charming. "Yes; and how you domineer over her yourself! You are a pretty one!" March usually found a chance to give a dig to herself.

At dinner Bess behaved uncommonly well. She smiled very broadly at any one who would look at her, and was so evidently cheerful by nature that Mrs. Lyon felt quite encouraged. Mrs. Lyon had a long talk with March before she took the afternoon train to New York.

"Is she sulky?"

"Not a bit. Never have seen the slightest evidence of it. And she does n't bear malice. She is the best child that way you ever saw."

"Is she truthful?"

"Just at present; but she will certainly try telling you stories. She does n't tell me any now because she knows I think it is dreadful. She is n't sure that any one else will feel so. She is sure to experiment. If she finds you feel the same horror, you can depend upon it she will be perfectly truthful." And she told Mrs. Lyon of some of her experiences with the young lady until the room echoed with laughter.

"Is she industrious?"

"She can do the most work and the best work you ever saw, if it is expected of her; but she will be just as inefficient as she is allowed to be."

"Is she affectionate?"

"I don't know;" and March looked depressed. "She has all the outward signs of it, but of anything more I don't know. I do really think now she is a little fond of me, but I don't always feel sure of it."

She felt less sure when she left the school, Bess seemed so wholly unconcerned.

"Going? Well, good-by! Hope you'll have a nice time! Tell Molly I'm going to make her a pincushion." And she smiled and nodded and seemed as indifferent as possible, while March

found that on her part she could n't bear to leave the little thing. She kept holding the little hands in hers and feeling the soft, rosy cheeks and kissing the nice little red mouth.

And Bess just laughed. All the time the child was saying to herself: "I don't care! I don't care! No, I don't care!" That night Mrs. Lyon heard a sniffing and sobbing from the tiny room, and going in found Bess crying as though her heart would break.

"What's the matter, dear? are you afraid?"

"No; I ain't afraid, neither. I want — March. She kisses me good-night — and tells — me — about Baby Jesus — and I want to live — with her."

John, in the meanwhile, was properly bestowing his infant and thinking it was "a jolly lark."

Dr. Logan was considerably taken aback when he found the individual to whom he must look for the payment of Ted's bills was only a boy himself. But such a boy! He wondered mightily how such a face and figure and manner and voice were ever combined in one lucky boy. He was all the more interested when he discovered John's relation to Ted, and resolved to bestow unusual pains on the young man.

John found himself wishing violently that he had been sent to that school.

"I never heard of a school like this, Dr. Logan. Is it your idea?"

"Not exactly," smiling. "But it certainly was an experiment. It has taken wonderfully. I could n't begin to fill this fall's applications."

The boys' rooms were all as clean as wax. The floors were hard wood and a bright rug lay before each little iron cot. The rooms were of two sizes: one held four single cots, one two. Each boy had a large box and a chest of drawers and a place for a trunk.

"The boys take care of their own rooms."

"Is that so?"

"Yes; nothing like it. It starts a boy right for all day to make his own room scrupulously clean and orderly. Every boy takes a bath every day."

"Jolly! that's about right!" was the appreciative remark. "I did n't know any school provided for such an emergency."

"There is nothing like cleanliness for a boy's morals. A low-minded boy when he is dirty will be a very fair boy when he is clean."

"How about the shops?"

"They are all superintended by finished workmen."

"What made you put the shops in as long as this is a regularly paid school?"

"This school is to make men. A boy who can work with his hands and make something is more of a man than the one who can't. And, other things being equal, he is better. These things are explicable too. I would like other shops and trades, but this is the best I can do at present."

They went over the shops and schoolroom. The school term would not open for three days and there were not more than half a dozen boys back. They were out in the playground. The doctor looked over his list and assigned Ted's room.

"I will put him with Ben Ross, Room 20, south exposure. Ben is twelve years old and one of the finest little fellows you ever saw. What do you think of Ted's abilities?"

"Oh, I expect him to hate books, but he ought to know something. I hoped he would like the shops."

"Which will he choose?"

"Joining, he says. When will Ben Ross come, and what is he?"

"He is a joiner. He will be here in two days, the day before term opens. I am glad your boy is here so early; I shall have a chance to know him. I aim at a close personal friendship with each of my boys. But it is next to impossible."

"Can the boys fix their rooms up if they like?"

"Anxious to have them." The doctor raised a window and called to a boy below, "Find Trent and Greg Hopkins for me, will you, please?"

"These Hopkins boys are cousins, of the same age, and have a room together, and I want you to see it. They are little fellows but they both have fine mothers."

Trenton and Gregory Hopkins came tearing up the stairs together, until they stood flushed and panting before the doctor. They were well-dressed, nice-looking boys of about thirteen.

"Show us your room, will you, boys?"

As they all walked down the hall together, Trenton, who had been looking admiringly at John, said:—

"Coming to this school?"

"No; but my brother is," pointing to Ted, who was in front with the doctor and Gregory.

"Pshaw! why don't you? I hoped you'd be in our nine and in our eleven. We beat the

others both games last spring — awful close games though !”

When Gregory unlocked his room door John exclaimed in his surprise. The window was draped with a yellow curtain of some soft stuff, and a couple of pots of flowers stood in the open window, while outside was a window box glowing with geraniums. The two little cot beds looked very white and neat in fresh spreads. There were two rocking-chairs, small ones. The washing arrangements were behind a screen made by the boys. They had made the frame and tacked in rich colored cretonne. To the inside of the screen were fastened bags and pockets for holding things. The two chests of drawers were put side by side with a cover across the top, and above them hanging bookshelves made by the boys. The shelves were well stocked with bright-backed books. The two boxes were placed together and covered, and pillows on them, so that they made quite an ornamental divan. Some pictures framed by the boys, and two brackets of their own handiwork, hung on the walls. The effect was most cozy and cheerful.

“ Ted, you and Ben must fix your room up, so

when I come Christmas I can admire it. You fellows are both joiners, are n't you?"

"Yes. Say, Trent, show him our book."

The doctor smiled as Trenton handed down a small, prettily bound book.

"There," said Gregory proudly, "that book was written by one of the boys here, Fred Stopes. It is a hunting story, and it was printed here and bound here. The doctor is going to offer a prize for the best story written this term — before Christmas, is n't it, doctor? — to be printed here. He is to give a prize for the best design for a cover for it, are n't you, doctor? Ted, I can tell you, we have the boss times here!"

Ted was rapidly rising to a high pitch of enthusiasm. Before John left he was saying "we" and "us" and "our," and all the time he was thinking, "Now you just must do your best, Ted Holland; you can't thank him any other way, and my stars, ain't he splendid!"

CHAPTER XV.

A CHRISTMAS TRIP.

WHEN Ted reached such a degree of proficiency in calligraphy as to inspire him with the ambition to write a letter, he was in a quandary. Should he write first to John or to Mrs. Dixon?

Respect, admiration, gratitude, love prompted him to send his first effort to John. Fear of seeming like a fool and of being laughed at made him waver. He knew how any letter from him would be received at the Dixons'. It would be praised extravagantly and treasured, while any letter he could write to John would simply expose his ignorance.

But a sense of the fitness of things carried the day. Ted's first funny scrawl was found one morning by John beside his plate at the breakfast table.

If Ted could have seen his young guardian's delight over that letter, he would have enjoyed a great peace.

"Can't be this is from Ted, Aunt Pomeroy.

I just believe it is! Wrote it himself! March, what do you think of that? Ted! Just think of it! Why, I can read it! It is regular writing with ink. And to think of the way he has signed it: 'Your little brother, Ted Holland.' Seems as though I must go straight to Philadelphia and see him. Can't seem to believe Ted can write a letter! Must n't I write him a long one though, and praise him!"

Ted also wrote a letter to Mrs. Dixon, but he scrupulously waited a week before sending it, that he might preserve a proper balance in the dispensation of these epistolary favors.

Mrs. Dixon was even more indiscriminately admiring than John.

"Jerry, listen to this! that blessed child! 'How are you? I hope you are well.' Ain't that just like him? always thinkin' of others, bless him! hopin' we're well and him starvin' down in that jail, most likely, thin as a rail and needin' fattenin'! 'How is Uncle Jerry?' Hear that, Jerry, askin' so polite and lovin' after you! 'How is Ponto?' To be sure! the smartness of that boy! Ponto here is waggin' his tail. You'd like to see Teddie, would n't you, Pont? 'How is Snowball and Dot?' Thinkin' of them calves;

ain't that just like him? Wants to know about everything. 'How is Dixie?' Wants to know about Dixie. That blessed child! I fairly can't see through my specs 'count of it all! 'How is Blackie?' Old Blackie too; he always did love that cat. Jerry, that boy has such a fondness for animals he's just cut out for a farm—for our farm. 'I want to see you all.' Jerry—just brings the tears to my eyes; wants to see us all! He is pinin' away in that prison house: no jam, I'll be bound, nor chicken gravy, and him so fond of it, nor light biscuit—and how he could eat 'em! So attentive to his plate as that blessed child always was—and him so neat and orderly and nice! 'Good-by. Yours truly, Ted.' Ends up just like a man. Jerry, that's a perfect letter, and we'll lay it in the Bible till we've done readin' his blessed little writin'."

After that John began to plan what he would do for Ted on Christmas.

"What shall I do, Aunt Pomeroy?"

"We must all be here for Christmas day at any rate. March is going to bring Bess over for the vacation, and Ted must come as soon as his school is out. What would you like to do then?"

"What would you do, March?"

"Why, I should take Ted off somewhere for a trip and get acquainted with him over again—have a jolly time. Go to Boston, why don't you? Put up at a good hotel and show Ted the sights. Get back here for New Year's."

"O March, if you would only come too!" was the enthusiastic rejoinder, which raised a laugh.

"Better do it, John. You'll have a lot of fun, and do better work than ever when you come back. Mr. Closson told me you did the strongest work he knew of."

John did not look pleased. He could not bear Mr. Closson. He did not know why, except because Mr. Closson was grown up and handsome and talented and particularly sensible about the way he pursued a quasi friendship with March—and because March quoted his opinions.

"Don't believe Uncle Chester would let me go. I wanted to come over to New York last Christmas with Jack Kendall and he wouldn't let me."

"Perhaps he would; write and ask."

"I'll get Ted. I'll go and bring him."

"Why don't you let him come over to New York by himself?" said Mrs. Pomeroy. "For a boy of Ted's habits a little more of his old-time

self-responsibility would be a great thing — for one day.”

“All right. I know he will like that if he is any like me.”

So he wrote to Mr. Pomeroy preferring his request, a request which would have been promptly refused had it not been shortly followed by a few lines from Mrs. Pomeroy.

“I always did think,” meditated Mr. Pomeroy, “that women were in a panic at once at the thought of a boy’s going anywhere by himself; my mother was; and here Lois Marjoribanks Pomeroy thinks it is all right. Well, if she does, he must go, and the blame be on her head. She thinks Ted’s being along will make it all right; queer notion.”

Ted was thrown into the greatest excitement he had ever experienced in his life by receiving the letter from John informing him that he was to go by himself to New York for Christmas day, and that then he and John would go to Boston “for a whole jolly week to ourselves, Ted, to have the most fun ever was.” Ben Ross could hardly restrain his envy, and the news spread like wildfire among the smaller boys with whom Ted naturally consorted; for they were only going home for

Christmas. Ted packed his little extensible bag a dozen times, and said good-by to Dr. Logan and the three assistants and the shop superintendents and the matron and all the sub-officials with such a rare hilarity of manner that it was contagious, and Ted somehow became a prominent figure until he was fairly started on his wonderful journey.

How grand it was to see John at the station and to feel through and through him that John was proud of him and very, very glad to see him; and then to ride on the elevated and to be greeted and kissed in the warm, pleasant hall by Mrs. Pomeroy as "Teddie, my dear little boy!" and by March with "Ted, bless you! ever so glad to see you!" and even by that jack-in-the-box Bess with "O Ted! Ted! the most fun—such a secret! we're to have the loveliest time!" for Bess had already been there a day, turning the house upside down in her so far unrestrained exuberance. March meant to put the brakes on speedily.

That very afternoon John took Ted all over New York, or so it seemed to Ted, and bought him a most extravagant suit of clothes. Even Ted knew it was very handsome, and that the

shoes and stockings and cap that accompanied the suit were of a decidedly extra finish.

"Oh," stammered Ted, "I don't need such clothes, do I—I— What makes you?"

"Oh," said John, good-humoredly imitating him, "they are better than you need ordinarily, for a fact; but I want you to look well here, and in Boston we are going to a fine hotel. And, Ted, it is such a lot of fun for one to see you look so well! and besides I always wore such clothes myself."

"Homely little kids like me don't need things like you would," was the deprecatory reply.

John laughed. "Nothing homely about you! You are as good a looking boy as a body often sees. You need n't worry about that."

And Ted wore his clothes, to the great admiration of Mary Ann and Molly, and behaved like a gentleman in them, to the great admiration of the rest of the family.

John also assisted Ted in the purchase of some Christmas presents, and altogether Ted was very nearly overwhelmed by the kaleidoscopic effect his vacation was beginning to assume.

At the last moment March and John decided to have a tree. Molly was delegated to accompany

the children into the city to see the sights, and the adornment of the tree went on fast and furiously. They had hardly realized that this would be practically the first Christmas for both the children.

Popcorn and candy and fruit and trinkets galore hung upon that tree. The presents were gathered around under it and they planned to have the first sight of the tree Christmas morning after breakfast and the distribution of presents; and they would light up the tree and have ice cream and a feast in the evening.

Such a Christmas morning as that was! The excitement ran higher than had been anticipated and became well-nigh unmanageable.

"Is this my tree, or all of ours? When I'm big I'm going to have a tree as high as The Tribune building and have it loaded with jewelry! Oh, what a lovely doll! Goody, goody! won't Gertie Payson and Edna Payson wish they had a doll like that! Won't Mrs. Lyon think that doll's trunk is worth something! How much did that cost—hundred dollars? When will Christmas come again—in five years? oh, five months! No? Well, I don't know what you did say—five days, I guess."

Ted felt almost ill over his presents, until John sat down beside him, and with a patience and kindness quite unlike him — for he usually joked with Ted — tried to explain to him that everybody gave presents Christmas, and it was n't to confer an obligation, but just for pleasure. On that day everybody was so happy he must feel happy too. He must know that all the presents he had would n't half show how much he was loved and how everybody wanted him to have a good time. The talk seemed to be all lost, for to have John speak so to him was the last straw; and Ted secluded himself in a corner.

“Ted Holland,” said March, coming over to him, “you trot right straight out of this; lazy boy like you! Here! I have a lot of things to do and want some help.”

Ted was on his feet in a minute and March contrived to keep him working as hard as he could work for twenty minutes, and by that time he was laughing as heartily as anybody, and talking in the braggiest Christmas way of his presents and of what he meant to do with them. Would n't Ben Ross and the Hopkins boys be astonished, though, when he got back!

Mrs. Pomeroy thought it a great pity that there

should not be more children to enjoy the tree in the evening, and March and John promptly acting on her suggestion brought eight little unchrist-mased boys and girls to feast on the evening's good things and to carry off the strippings from the tree.

The next morning John and Ted started for Boston. They went by train and meant to return on the steamer *Pilgrim*.

In all Ted's wildest dreams, the actual present pleasure of that ride had never been suspected. At first he was in such a beatific state that conversation was out of the question. Who was he anyway? Theodore Holland, of Logan Institute, on his way with his wealthy brother, John Holland, to pass the Christmas holidays in the renowned city of Boston. Impossible! But a glance at the fine cloth in his trowsers, at the soft, fine black stockings, at his ravishingly shiny, easy shoes, at the ends of his new silk tie, barely to be seen by himself, at the corner of the handkerchief sticking out of his breast pocket, assured him that some change at any rate had been made in the fortunes of one Ted Larrimer, whilom news-boy and bootblack.

The two bought things, and they got off at

stations and stood on the platform, and Ted's tongue gradually loosened and John began to think he had never had such fun in his life as hearing Ted rattle on. What we do at school was his theme. The fine ball games, the tricks, the wonderful feats this one or that one could perform. They went to the Adams House and Ted saw his name — his own new name — written on the register beside John's. And then to go to their room — his room and John's — that seemed appalling. He was n't sure but that he had rather be back at Logan Institute. John was n't somebody you could have a room with, like Ben Ross or any other boy in the world. And then they had dinner. It was such a funny time to have dinner, and such a wonderful dinner, and such obsequious waiters ; they made Ted almost frantic. He was n't sure but that they might send him out of that dining hall in disgrace if he should drop his knife or fork. And how grandly John acted ! just ordered those waiters around right and left and made them bring all sorts of delicious things. Ted wondered vaguely if in heaven they had anything half so fine as that hotel.

The next day was put in to the utmost. All

the sights were seen — Faneuil Hall, the State House, Bunker Hill and its monument, the navy yard, the Common, the Public Gardens, Cambridge, and Harvard College. The boys were thoroughly exhausted by night.

John had letters to two artists and he wanted to see all the picture galleries and the Art Museum. He wondered a little what Ted would think of the pictures. Ted thought they were all wonderful, but it was evident he did not make the slightest distinction between one picture and another, except that he did linger longer by a picture with an Indian in it and by one of some boys going in swimming.

The same afternoon in which they had been to the Art Museum John was looking at the hotel register when he was slapped on the shoulder and a voice cried, "By Jove! great luck! John Holland as I live! What ever brought you up here?" and turning he at once recognized Jack Kendall. He was very glad to see him, shook hands warmly, and they stood there talking.

"Been back to school any this year? No? Well, I'm glad a fellow of your parts is n't in that hole this year. I could n't stand it any longer," with a knowing look and wink. "No

place for a young fellow with any blood in him! Would n't suit you any longer, I know!" slapping him. "The governor tried to have me go to college, but it did n't work very well. I was conditioned in everything and got into a scrape first thing and found myself home again before Thanksgiving. There there was a set! Jove! we painted things red! Outside of their infernal books colleges are very decent institutions. Well, where are you — New York? Gad! wish I was in your shoes. The old gentleman keeps me tied right down there in Albany; only up here by rowing for it. In a good set? You were so tough for your age! Have a cigar."

"Why, I don't smoke!"

"Did very well at smoking at school; supposed you were an old hand by this time. Well, you'll learn of course. Now you must take dinner with me; I have the bulge on ordering the rummest drinks — got the cue from a fellow in college whose father's in the biz. I'll tip the wink to you — thing I would n't do for everybody, John my boy!" another slap.

"I have a little boy here with me," said John, "and you must excuse me. I don't want him to believe that I think drinks are all right."

"Sly! By Jove, but you're sly! Don't want any peaching on you! Just leave the boy out, or scare him. Leave the brat to me; I'll fix him!"

By this time John felt a sort of loathing rising up in his soul. Was this the fellow he had admired as a wit and a man of the world? He must have changed for the worse. But John could not help seeing that he was about the same, only a little more developed. John found himself examining this elegantly dressed, slender, rather sickly looking young man with a curious repulsion. "Would I get to look like that?" he thought as he noted the general expression of weak badness. "O March, March, I know now how you despised me!" And seeming to see himself as he was the last year at school, imitating this Kendall, admiring his boastful acquaintance with evil, he felt a sudden self-abasement he had never dreamed of before. He loathed himself far more than he did Jack Kendall. In an instant of time he recalled low stories he had heard and ill thoughts he had thought, and hated them, hated them from the bottom of his soul. Would his soul grow to look out of his face as Jack Kendall's did out of his? Perhaps it did already. And he longed for goodness. The word "good" said itself over in his

heart again and again, as though there were something strong and helpful about it. His whole soul seemed to swell with a great longing for the right and the true and the pure — and with it all there came a peaceful, happy feeling that it was so, that he could choose the right, that he could feel as he thought now March must feel. "Yes, she feels just so; and now I know why she could n't speak to me when she found my heart did n't care."

It all took but a moment, and Jack Kendall was rattling on about a set of fellows. "I will introduce you and show you a point or two in pool. Ballard is a fine pool player — expert — and you are fairly cut out for the game. We'll have a rip-tearing good time to-night."

Kendall was unreservedly glad to see John, for John had been a great favorite in school. But for other reasons he regarded it as a providential occurrence that he should have met him at this juncture. His funds were very low, and John with money in his pockets would materially assist him in doing Boston as it should be done. So he was exerting himself beyond his wont to ingratiate himself into John's friendly humor and his pocket.

He was disgusted beyond expression when John rose with a very beautiful but certainly a very con-

clusive sort of a smile, and holding out his hand said as though the matter admitted of no discussion, "I was awfully glad to see you, Kendall; but as for doing all the things you are planning, I can't. You're awfully kind about it, but I am here only for part of a week with a small boy, and we have something to do every minute of the time; and as I must keep him with me you can easily see I could n't accept your invitations." And with a very cordial grip he took himself off, holding his handsome head so high that Kendall shook his own with a sigh. "Don't seem right that a fellow like that should have money and good looks and spunk and everything. Must be a difference way kids are born."

John felt very grateful to Ted. It seemed to him that Ted had helped him out of a tight place, and he told him so. Ted listened in amazement, only grasping the idea that in some way John thought he had helped him to want to be good. He would have been inclined to scoff at that notion — his hero was perfect anyway — but John was terribly in earnest, and all Ted could do was to solemnly renew his covenant with himself to follow, at however great a distance, in the footsteps of his demigod.

The rest of their stay in Boston seemed to Ted to vanish in the most unaccountable fashion. In prospect the time had seemed to him endless. In retrospect it had melted—it was nowhere. But in its place he had memories that would last him a lifetime—memories where well-dressed gentlemen and well-dressed waiters mingled most democratically; where sights that stirred great patriotic fervor seemed one with sights which awakened a sense of the beautiful; where funny things and sad things and grand things and wonderful things all were put to snatches of music and flooded with a sunshine partly material, and partly just the sunshine of John's perpetual good humor.

But they had to go back, and that was almost the best of all. For there was the great steamer and the dining room, and the decks and the people, and the wonderful band, and the funny stateroom, and the being welcomed at the place he already called home, as John did, with all the honors due to travelers from foreign parts.

John wondered if Logan Institute would be big enough to hold the boy.

"He will work after this," said Mrs. Pomeroy in answer to his question. And Mrs. Pomeroy was a wonderful woman for knowing things.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CITY OF ROME.

THE CITY OF ROME." That legend adorned nearly everything in sight, from the life-preservers to the cap bands. People in all stages of hilarity were hurrying on board. The dock was crowded. There was a constant noise of orders given, and of drays banging over the heavy planks, and of the crashing of baggage and freight. Two young ladies, ordinarily known among their friends as "the Murray girls," had placed camp chairs near the railing, in the best position to command a view of the gang plank, and were eagerly watching those coming on board — men, women, and children, old ladies and babies, dogs, bird cages, baskets, bundles, valises. The Murray girls almost wondered if there would be anything left in New York.

"The great trouble is," said Belle Murray, "you can't tell who is going to stay on board. The very people we shall pick out to get acquainted with will walk right down that gang plank when the bell rings."

"Some people must stay on board. Perhaps we can tell; let's guess."

They each had a passenger list, and Miriam, with her finger on a name, would say, "There! that man with the overcoat on his arm, and the yellow bag with the umbrella through the straps — that is Alexander Blower."

"Oh, it is not. He is Richard Fulton Holli-day."

"Belle, how can you! He does n't look a bit like Richard. There! there is Allan Farnham, Mrs. Farnham, Grace Farnham, Adelaide Farnham, Walter Farnham, and nurse. How she must like to be put down as nurse!"

"There's another boy there. I think those people are the Walkers."

"There is only one girl with the Walkers."

"Well, the other girl in the crowd is a cousin. Here she is up here — Miss Gertrude Simpson."

"No, there's Miss Simpson now; she's a school-teacher, and wears glasses."

The Murray girls, in spite of unusual amiability, might have come to grief in their disagreements, had not their attention been so speedily attracted to newcomers that nothing could be carried to a conclusion.

"Oh, is n't she nice looking! I hope she will stay on board."

"Look at that lovely gray-haired man. *He* is somebody!"

"Oh, did you see that one? Perfect gorilla!"

Then they clutched each other violently, and looked eagerly at a corner of the dock. Coming towards the gang plank was a very noticeable group. A distinguished looking lady was talking earnestly with a tall gentleman, who bent slightly toward her as she talked. He had his hand on the arm of a young fellow who was also listening to the lady, but with divided attention.

"Why, he's *wonderful!*" said Miriam. "I never saw anybody begin to be so handsome. Depend upon it, he's not going to stay; no such luck!"

"He is n't more than eighteen or nineteen or twenty or something."

There were three other people in the party — a young lady of very striking appearance, exceedingly graceful in her walk and carriage, and with a most attractive face; she was accompanied by two gentlemen who seemed to devote themselves to hearing all she said, as though that were their chief business in life.

"I like the girl best."

"I don't ; I like that boy best. What a figure ! and did you ever see such a face ? Now he is smiling ; the man is joking him. I wonder if that is his father. Yes, that's his father, and the boy is to be left in New York. The girl is a niece — Dear me, how can we ever wait to find out ? There, that's the last of his yellow hair."

The girls craned their necks over the railing, to the great danger of their hats, but the party was out of sight.

By the time the great steamer was starting and the sheep had been separated from the goats, and the black mass of people on the docks was being speckled with waving handkerchiefs, answered by waving handkerchiefs on the deck, the Murray girls had come a little nearer to the truth in their conjectures about the most interesting group.

The older gentleman and the two young gentlemen who had squired the damsel were in plain sight on the dock. The lady, the handsome boy, and the girl were by the railing.

After two years' stay in New York, it came to be regarded as a fixed fact that March must go to Paris to study. Mr. Colfax urged it strenuously. Her instructors, and others who claimed authority

in such matters in New York, gave her no rest until she was determined on Paris. Her work so far had been strikingly successful. She was very much sought after, and treated as a youthful genius, and made to understand that great things were expected of her—a state of things which would have been disastrous to the majority of young people in her position, but which was absolutely without effect on March. She was as one who sees something afar, and in pressing toward it is vastly indifferent to things on the way. At times, things which were meant to be highly flattering to her annoyed her; but even that was growing more seldom. She went on her own way, working toward a great end, with a whole-souled purpose that seemed to keep her unspotted from all the things that would have tarnished her sincerity, her earnestness, her love of truth.

Mrs. Pomeroy had dreaded the New York life when she found what it was going to mean—when she found that newspaper notices and interviews and flattery and unwise commendation were to be the order of the day. But the dread vanished as the mist before the sun when she realized how March followed her ideals and

lived with her heart fortified by her high ambitions against all the buzzing around her.

John's line of work was wholly different. Illustration was all he looked to. He did strong work and showed spirit in every touch. He had such a free, ready hand, such a quick eye, such a knack for catching the soul of a thing that he soon had his own crowd of admirers, and grew accustomed to prophecies of future success. It would have been in accordance with his open, friendly nature to have been influenced by such things. He might easily have been led to relax effort and trust to genius; but in this strait March unconsciously did great things for him. Seeing how embryonic and crude all his finest achievements were compared with March's work, noticing the great gulf between the students like himself who bowed down before him, and the great men who wondered at her genius, and watching the unmoved manner in which she worked steadily on, never heeding all the talk she heard, just desiring to work out the best that was in her for very truth's sake—he developed the stronger side of his nature and learned himself how to work for work's sake, and cultivated the self-discontent that alone can go on to great ends.

It had long become a foregone conclusion that where March should study John must study. He was wild for Paris; one by one the more enterprising students caught the Paris fever, and in Paris they must study to do themselves justice. March and John often wondered just how much there was in it; how much actual advantage there was to an American to be imbued with the principles and technique of French art; and they made great resolutions about this and that and the other, in case they should study in Paris; but Paris gradually and surely won the day. To Paris they must go.

Mrs. Pomeroy was in favor of the plan. She had great hopes for March, and if Paris was the place to study, as everybody said, she too concluded that Paris it should be.

They had spent the summer in Wellsburg. Ted had been at the Dixons', Bess had deported herself in accordance with March's admonitions; John had gone with Mr. Pomeroy for a few weeks to the Yellowstone, and had met the Wellsburg party in New York to take the steamer. After his few weeks' absence, March had thought she had never seen anybody so handsome. He looked so tanned and fresh and strong, and he was so glad to see her.

"I was just miserable without you, March," he said frankly.

"Yes, you look as though you had had a horrible time," was the laughing answer.

He laughed too. "You can laugh ; but I would get so lonesome to see you I didn't know what to do. I longed just for a sight of you, to know you were around somewhere, and I wanted you to see everything I did. I don't see how March can be so mean, Aunt Pomeroy. I wanted her and she did n't want me!"

Mrs. Pomeroy smiled, and March hastily remarked, "Yes, I did. I did n't realize how disgusting life could seem if you were n't around."

Mr. Pomeroy had about made up his mind, though with some phantasmal regrets, that John meant to stick to art for some years to come. Business, he thought, would have been so much more sensible. And then, that John should go to Paris ! It shocked him that Mrs. Pomeroy should urge it. He remembered too many things about a certain six months he himself had spent in Paris as a young man to feel wholly satisfied that this ward of his, brimful of life, should be turned loose in Paris.

But if he was to be with Mrs. Pomeroy — he

wanted the boy with Mrs. Pomeroy. "Lois Marjoribanks Pomeroy is the most wonderful woman," he would say to himself again and again, "and I vow if March is n't going to go her one better. John must stay with them even if they see fit to spend a year or so in Hades;" and with grim determination he agreed to his ward's contemplated sojourn in the French capital.

It was very shortly after John's eighteenth birthday that they set sail on the *City of Rome*. For four months in the year, as John said, he and March were just the same age; and he claimed to feel better that four months than during the other eight.

It was a great excitement, this first sea voyage for March and John. It was hard for them to realize that Mrs. Pomeroy had been over three times before, and that none of it all was new to her.

They got their steamer chairs out on the shady side of the deck, and the robes in case they should need them, and their staterooms — John's was across the little hall from Mrs. Pomeroy's and March's — were made shipshape. Then they too began to investigate their fellow passengers. There seemed to be unfailing interest in watching

the various faces, picking out relationships, discovering some fact which threw light on the connection of one and another—facts which must immediately be announced and commented on. These people had been over before. A lady had called that man “Edward dear.” That girl was acquainted with that other one, for they were walking together a moment ago. That man was a minister surely.

The first meal on shipboard was one long to be remembered. John and March had picked out one of the side tables, and they and the Murray family just filled it. The Murray girls could hardly believe their good fortune when Mrs. Pomeroy and March and John actually walked to that table and sat down. The girls squeezed each other’s hands under the table. They wondered how long it would be before they would be acquainted, and how people got acquainted when there was no one to introduce them. But before they hardly were aware what was happening, Mrs. Pomeroy was talking with their father, and John had smiled at both of them as he passed them something, and March was laughing with their mother, and the Murray uncle and his son had helped them out with their laugh.

The moon rose early that night ; the sea was quiet, and very few people had been induced by strange internal unrest to prefer the solitude of their staterooms. Mrs. Pomeroy sat in her deck chair talking with the lady who sat next to her, and March and John promenaded around and around the deck with all the other promenaders. They were such a noticeable pair that everybody knew them by sight, and many were the guesses as to who they were and where they were going. And how they enjoyed it!—the fresh sea air, the rush of the water, the throb of the engine, the talk and singing and laughter of their fellow passengers, the broad, mellow moonlight over all that shifting expanse of water, the thoughts that would crowd into their minds of the future they were going toward—the thrill of the novelty of all around them.

“John, is n’t it—just—immense!” said March.

And he heaved a mighty sigh and guessed it was.

But they each understood how the other felt, and John looked at March and wondered how any face could be so beautiful as the strong, earnest face beside him, lighted up by her fresh enjoyment of the moment. And March looked at

John and wondered, as she always did, if other people could see his face as she did: the honest eyes that were so friendly, that look in his face that induced confidence and trust, boy as he was. Their eyes met.

"It's so good to see you again, March!" said John fervently. "Makes me feel too good to live."

"I wonder if it is as much downright, heart-warming satisfaction as it is to see you," was the smiling answer. "John, we must make everything of this Paris plan — work!"

"You will be certain to work. And I feel now as though I should."

"Well, of course. You have such a steady, self-reliant way, John, of going on and working, and seem so little disturbed by what people say to you and so able to go on doing your best in spite of everybody, that I fairly envy you sometimes."

John looked at March in astonishment. But she was perfectly sincere. He felt nonplused.

"It does seem, March, as though you didn't have good sense sometimes," he said bluntly.

"Politeness! What do you mean?"

"If I had said to you what you said to me,

it would have been appropriate. That is the way you strike me."

"Honestly? Well, I meant what I said. I'll tell you, John, we must make a solid, inviolable, outspoken agreement to look after each other's education. If I felt sure you would do your best for me, criticize me, help me, keep me from being wrongly influenced, see that I keep art true, I would feel tolerably easy, for, it is the solemn truth, I believe more in your judgment and insight than in that of anybody. We must be each other's guard."

"Will you do the same for me? Care whether I get on or not? talk right up to me and make me see what art tendencies I am cultivating? Tell you, I could do a lot if you only will."

"This is to be no sinecure; we are to really keep close watch on each other's work, and, right or wrong, say what we think."

"Give me your hand on it."

And standing by the ship's railing, in the moonlight, they clasped hands in a most solemn way and vowed to guard each other's art interests to the verge of annoyance; and then they both laughed. Truly it was impossible to be solemn long when everything was so delightful.

They began their promenade again, and their minds naturally reverted to their small wards. Ted was back at Logan Institute and Bess at Mrs. Lyon's. It was uncertain just how long Paris would keep the young art students. If they should stay over the year, — and they had little doubt that they should, — Ted was to go to the Dixons' for the summer, and Bess was to remain with Mrs. Lyon.

Ted seemed to be in a sort of transition stage which was a surprise to everybody. Dr. Logan wrote that Ted made a very poor joiner. He was put into each of the other two shops in succession, and seemed as awkward as before. But in the past year he had taken a wonderful start in his studies. Dr. Logan wrote that he never had had a boy under him who had pushed ahead so rapidly as Ted. As soon as the boy fairly realized what books were, and that one could read in books how to make everything that is made; in what ways everything was discovered or invented that ever has been discovered or invented; about all the countries of the earth, what they look like and what lives and grows in them; about all the men and women who have ever made a name for themselves, and what they did and wrote and

thought; about how the earth came to be, and the stars, and all the things he wanted to know about, — he was wild in his zeal to read. The doctor had to watch him very carefully to make him take the proper amount of exercise, and to see that he went to bed and took care of himself. Dr. Logan picked out books for Ted with great wisdom, and the boy's appetite for knowledge was whetted rather than satiated by what he read.

"We can't tell now just what this will run into," Dr. Logan said to John the last time he was at the Institute. "The boy seems to have suddenly waked up, and with this result. The probabilities are that this will prove merely temporary. In a few months he will not be so enthusiastic. I don't believe he is a student, or will be. He has n't given any evidence of it heretofore. He has simply done faithfully what he was given to do, and with hardly the average interest or quickness. He is a splendid boy and will make a fine man. I am judge enough to assert that positively; but I doubt if this new streak of his lasts or leads him into anything very bookish."

"What shall I do with him if he does want an education?"

"Leave him right here with me until he is thirteen, and then send him to a classical school where he can get a really thorough fitting for college. But until that time, embryo scholar though he may be, he will be far better off with me, for his mind will have freedom. If he chooses to go on, and really develops a student-like habit, the reading I shall lay out for him will be simply invaluable at his age, and his mind will be only receiving the ordinary training the other boys receive to make it self-reliant and thorough, and will not be warped by cramming."

John wondered greatly what Ted would turn out to be. To him who had been coolly indifferent to books and instruction, and who had acquired what he knew rather by absorbing it from others in the general walks of life than by working for it, Ted's astonished interest in everything he read was almost a shock. To have Ted infatuated with the idea that the earth was round and whirled constantly, and was once soft, and that there were other suns besides ours; to have him absorbed in meditation on the new thought that coal was once wood, and that there was a time when there were no people on the earth, and when huge animals ranged among strange

vegetable growths; to have him making a real human being of Charlemagne and fighting his wars again with him and going on a crusade in a very glow of enthusiasm, — it all was strange to John beyond reason. He never felt that way. He had rejoiced to read pirate and Indian stories; he had cared about guns and how they were made, and things that he could see; but to have sat down when he was Ted's age to read about the earth or some old history would have been undesirable past imagination. But John had secret hopes that Ted was going to be a student, and go to college and distinguish himself. March discovered it, and encouraged him to so believe, and sympathized with him fully.

"He shall go," said John, "to the University of Vermont, where my mother and my father went, and I'll be glad there's a Holland there again. Dear! I don't see why I didn't take to books, considering my father and my mother both" —

"They used it all up, perhaps."

"And you're just as bad in the other way. Just think of your reading Greek and Latin and things when you were n't twelve! Professor Call said you were fairly an expert in Greek — could

read it better than hosts of college graduates. And you keep it up all the time. How did you keep out of college?"

"Did n't want to go. Never wanted to go after I was fourteen, though I expected to as a matter of course before that. But you know my mother taught me, and she could put information into a rock if she tried; I know she could. Well, we've cast our lot for art. Now don't let's make a failure, if there's anything in us to prevent it."

CHAPTER XVII.

PARIS.

VERY few art students go to Paris under as favorable conditions as March and John. Owing to the impression March had already created in New York, and to her large acquaintance with well-known artists who were one and all anxious to encourage and aid her, they had introductions to prominent American artists in Paris and to some few French artists; hence their opportunities for immediately being ushered into the inside ring of the Paris art world were quite unprecedented for students of their years.

Until October they spent their time seeing the sights and meeting people.

"For, mother," explained March with philosophic zeal, "how could we settle down to work from morning until night when we had not seen the Louvre nor Versailles nor the Bois nor Saint Cloud nor the streets nor anything? I never had such a jolly time in my life as I'm having now! Why, Paris is beautiful!"

Paris was beautiful. The great white bridges



over the Seine, the massive masonry of the embankments, the towers and turrets and embrasures and endlessness of the Louvre, the prodigality of sculptured work, the wide streets, the trees, the parks, the fountains, the arcades, the boutiques, the restaurants, the absence of the filthy pauperism which flaunts itself on London streets, the air of well-fed decency among the wooden-shoed portion of the populace — no wonder Paris seemed beautiful!

Mrs. Pomeroy had never liked Paris, but she knew it was beautiful. She found little difficulty in enjoying their days of sight-seeing, and March and John found it very unsatisfactory to get along without her. John began to realize what it meant to be "well read" and "well informed." When he and March were alone together March was constantly surprising him by what she knew. "O John, this must be so;" and "You know where such and such a thing happened;" "Oh, yes! I know about this place now. In 1772," etc.

How March knew these things was a mystery to John. But when Mrs. Pomeroy was with them March was continually asking her mother questions and could win from her long tales — tales

that everybody did not know — about certain localities, and bits of history that surrounded the spot or building with an entirely new atmosphere. John consoled himself with the thought that as he could see these places, and had a memory of his own, he would soon know all that March or her mother did. But it happened to occur to him one day that these things they told were parts of a whole which rested in their consciousness and not in his. That perhaps they could go to London or St. Petersburg or Berlin or Rome or Florence and know as much about those places and their history and their worthy men and women as they knew about Paris. And where would he be then? He thought of Ted and felt a sympathy for the boy's enthusiasm for the contents of a book. Why had n't it ever struck him before? Why had n't he made use of his time and become acquainted before this with people and places, so that he too would know something? He felt humiliated. All the time March had known how little he knew, and he himself, secure in his ignorance, had never thought of it. He had felt as though he knew as much as anybody. He had cared nothing about it. When would he ever catch up to March? It

was n't fair. She had been taught things. His mother could have taught him too. He knew she knew everything just as Mrs. Pomeroy did. It seemed to him that he was a monument of ignorance and altogether too old to remedy the matter. He longed to have been a prodigy. He wished to go to March and say, "When I was n't but six years old I knew all you know and more too." And then the thought of how easily March would grant the point, and of how little estimate she placed upon any information she had picked up, and of how constantly she was thinking of things that she meant to know more about, instead of any poor little things she did know—he could not help laughing. "Well, I'll never tell how inferior I feel," he said to himself. "But I'm not going to be outwalked in everything by March Pomeroy. I don't mean to be anybody's fool. I know my letters, and it is to be hoped I've got gumption enough to read something, if I don't think it is exciting enough to keep me awake nights; and I'll just astonish March yet by what I know! I'll get Aunt Pomeroy to help me and tell me what to read and get her not to tell March."

However, when he broached the subject to

Mrs. Pomeroy, March happened to come in, and as she did not seem in the least surprised, and was evidently wholly unconscious of John's mental upheaval, and fell in comradely with his reading scheme, vowing she would read what he did, he forgot his vow of secrecy, and decided not to try to be so astonishing, but to content himself with learning what he could.

Ted and Bess, in their respective educational institutions, allowed their thoughts for a time to run largely on the whereabouts of the Pomeroy-Holland faction, and each was weighed down by the responsibility of having a correspondent in a foreign land—weighed down, however, would hardly apply to Bess; she was rather puffed up thereby. Bessie's dearest friend for the time being was Edna Payson, whose father and mother were missionaries in India, and Edna was a very faithful little girl about writing to her mother. During the period of their most rabid friendship she always read her epistolary compositions to Bess, who was consumed with envy over the beauty of their diction. The letters always began, "My darling mamma," and closed, "Your loving little daughter, Edna."

Bess was, of course, asked often by the children about her home and her papa and mamma. She described her home accurately, both as it existed in New York and in Wellsburg, though occasionally she could not resist the temptation in her tales to throw in an extra servant for her own special benefit. As to her mamma and other relatives, she never flinched, though she was careful not to discourse on that subject when Mrs. Lyon or her two rubicund nieces were within hearing. Her mamma was very young and very beautiful and very loving and kind; always called her "My darling child"; never punished her; put her to bed every night; bathed her every day; made all her clothes herself, and was in short devoted to her. She also had a grandmother who lived in the same house, and her name was Mrs. Pomeroy too. They were both Mrs. Pomeroy. The facts about her father she slurred over, unless she was very vigorously pumped. She had aunts and uncles, describing Mr. and Mrs. Dixon, Mr. and Mrs. Cole, at the tollgate, and Mrs. Shedd, who taught her. The tollgate boy and Ted were her cousins. Mr. Pomeroy and John she adopted for uncles. When she decided to write to March she and Edna Payson wrote their letters together,

and Bessie's letter read marvelously like Edna's. March's feelings are not to be described when she opened the letter she had long been hoping for and read some of the sentences:—

“My darling mamma. I hope you are well. How is dear grandma? How is my Uncle John? I hope they are well. How is dear grandpa? I hope he is well,” and so on to the end — “Your loving little daughter, Bessie Pomeroy.”

March was enraged as well as amused. “The conceited little thing — just thinking of herself! I'll take her down!”

So she straightway answered the letter, returning the one Bess had written. She told her how pleased she had been to receive her letter, and then when she opened it she discovered it was not meant for her at all.

As you have no darling mamma, it is very foolish of you to try to write to one. And as for “grandma” and “grandpa” and “Uncle John,” nobody on earth knows who they are, and certainly you do not. I send the letter back to you, for it certainly was never meant for me.

The rest of the letter, however, was very affectionate and amusing.

Bess was not in the least disconcerted. "Well," she thought to herself, "I expect when I'm grown up she'll be my mamma then. I should have thought she'd have known who grandma and grandpa and Uncle John were. I just sha'n't show that part of my letter to Edna Payson."

On a hint of possible Christmas presents from Paris, Bess reformed her methods and wrote an exemplary letter, such as she had never written before; but she did not abate one jot of her pretensions before the girls. Her mamma and grandma in Paris soon outshone the relations of any and all of the other children. Her unholy ambition and heady pride led her too far, however, and swift retribution overtook her. She had scorned one Daisy Tagert, and had cast aspersions on some tale the child had told of her mother's fine clothes, and had expounded the glories of her own mamma's apparel until she had quite surpassed all her former efforts in that direction. But the worm turned. Daisy Tagert rushed tearfully to Mrs. Lyon, followed by a crowd of interested spectators, though not by Bess.

"Mrs. Lyon," wailed Daisy, "is Bessie Pomeroy's mamma beautifuller than mine, and does

her grandmother wear red satin dresses *always*? And is her mamma covered with di'mints, even in bed?"

"No," said the indignant Mrs. Lyon. "Bessie Pomeroy has no mamma, and she knows it."

"Oh! oh! oh!" chorused the astonished little girls.

"Mary, bring Bessie to me."

Bess came somewhat reluctantly.

"I thought you were a truthful little girl," said Mrs. Lyon severely, "and you have been telling things you knew were not true to all these children. Why did you tell them you had a mamma when you know you have not?"

"Why," said Bess, unabashed, "you know I pretend March Pomeroy is my mamma, and I call her mother my grandma."

"You don't really call her so. And why did n't you tell the children you were pretending?"

"Would n't have been no fun in that," muttered Bess, hanging her head.

"And then you went on telling these children other things that you knew very well were quite untrue. I can hardly believe it of you! What would Miss Pomeroy think if she knew, when she is so anxious to have you honest and truthful?"

"I am honest and truthful," asserted Bess.

"Tell these children the truth now, and explain."

Bess flushed a little at that, her first evidence of embarrassment.

"I was pretending what I told you, and it is n't really truly so. I am March Pomeroy's little girl, and all is true I told you about her, except the di'mints and things, only she is n't my mamma, nor her mamma is n't my grandma."

"Where's your Uncle John?" asked one of the little girls.

"He is n't my Uncle John; but the rest is true."

"And your Uncle Jerry and Aunt Cole and Cousin Ted?"

"They're all true, only they ain't relations,—except pretend," rising to the emergency. "And I can tell lots lovelier things about them, and pretend relations are just as good to a little child as real ones!"

As Mrs. Lyon said afterward, one could n't judge Bess by the same standard as other children, and though what she said would have been pathetic from any other child, that element was wholly lacking, considering that the speaker was Bess.

The other little girls were sent away, and Mrs. Lyon talked to Bess a long time, but with no visible effect.

"I did n't know anything was wrong in pretending relations," said Bess sweetly; "but I won't do it any more if you don't like it."

As soon as John had started for Paris, Ted read everything that Dr. Logan could give him about that city, and had examined with the greatest interest all the photographs and pictures Dr. Logan could find.

John's surprise over Ted's letter was almost as great as March's over Bessie's, but accompanied by quite different emotions. It seemed so odd to read in Ted's writing:—

Is the Arc de Triomphe as big looking as the picture? Can you go on top of it? Is there really a big N on Napoleon's bridges? Can you see anything of the Bastille? Do they have guillotines in Paris now? How wide is the Seine? Can you go fishing in it? Does everybody talk French? Can you talk French yet? Will you let me learn French? Have you been in the big library yet? Dr. Logan says it's the largest in the world.

But there was something more in the letter

that made John smile, and made his heart grow warm toward the little fellow.

Mr. Pomeroy had taken quite a fancy to Ted, and after seeing John off on the City of Rome he had gone out to Logan Institute to refresh himself by a sight of Ted. Ted was such a sympathetic little fellow that before he knew it Mr. Pomeroy was talking to him about John as he would not have been likely to have talked to any one else. He even enlarged on his fears. Paris was such a wicked city, and John was so young. He was afraid John might do wrong before he knew it. Without suspecting what he was doing, Mr. Pomeroy filled poor Ted's soul with horrible fears. John seemed to him to be surrounded by horrid and cruel dangers—the worst sort of dangers; for in connection with his hero, wrong or evil was simply appalling. Ted carried his horror with him morning, noon, and night. He dreamed awful things. What he felt, it was simply impossible to confide to any one. For comfort's sake, he fell to thinking or saying a little prayer a hundred times a day: "Take care of John; keep him good. Take care of John; keep him good."

And with great trepidation and a very shaky pen, he wrote at the end of his letter:—

Is Paris a very bad city? No bad city could hurt you, could it? I am trying to be a good boy for you.

It seemed to John as though he could feel what the little fellow meant, and knew what he was thinking. "Bless him! I'll write to him this very day. He sha'n't be worrying his poor little heart out over me."

And he wrote the best letter he could, telling Ted all the interesting things, and then writing things that he knew would quiet the poor boy's fears. He told him how glad he was that he was trying to be a good boy for him; that he himself was trying to be good for Ted's sake, and he wanted Ted to be honest inside, and pure-hearted, so that he would hate evil, and that bad things would offer no temptations to him; that since he had begun to think about such things he felt very differently from what he used to do when he did not think at all, and that now he would rather feel that bad thoughts and bad things were hateful to him than anything else; and he hoped they would grow more hateful to him; that he wanted to remember all the time that honorable, pure, upright thoughts were the only thoughts fit for a manly man.

March and John did not seem to get very much time to talk about things apart from what they saw or heard or read or what they were doing at their work. In one way John felt that they were farther apart than that first summer at Wellsburg ; but one evening, after he had shown her Ted's letter, and knew that she was aware what was worrying the boy, he asked her abruptly if she remembered that morning in Wellsburg when he had said he had read bad books and she had turned her back on him.

"That was sort of awful of me, was n't it, John, when you were so honest about it? But you can't think how I felt;" and her eyes shadowed at the recollection.

"Yes, I can!" was the eager reply. "I did n't understand then, but I know now. I feel just so myself. I did n't ever tell you about meeting Jack Kendall at the Adams House that Christmas Ted and I went to Boston; but I did see him, and it came over me like a flash of lightning how you felt that time, and I was glad I knew. I feel a great deal more about it all now. I have liked to feel as though somehow I thought and felt the way you do, since then, even if you did n't know it, and I knew you would like it." And John

smiled the sort of a smile March had seen sometimes on his face; but it always made a little lump in her throat, she did n't know why, unless it was because she knew she never could hope to work that out in marble.

“O John, you're the best boy!” she said; and the peaceful feeling of the trust and good fellowship that followed for both in the next few moments far outweighed the disappointment and sense of injustice of that far-away summer morning in Wellsburg.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PARIS SALON.

TROPICAL plants in profusion ; trickling and splashing fountains ; walks and benches ; far overhead a great sky — of glass ; from one direction the tinkling and clink of glass and china and silver. A glance that way would show a long, pillared portico, and innumerable marble-topped tables, and groups of people sitting by them, and alert white-aproned waiters. Through a great archway in the opposite direction one could see streams of people going up wide, massive stairs, or coming down, or coming through the arch. But none of these things were what the intelligent observer was most intent upon seeing. Under the palms, among the tropical plants, around the fountains, along the walks, opposite the benches, were pieces of sculpture and groups of statuary. Not old Greek pieces, broken torsos, armless gods and goddesses, but all white and modern and new. For this was the sculpture exhibition of the Salon, the great and unequalled Paris Salon, where three thousand paintings

alone were freshly placed before the insatiable public.

One piece of sculpture always drew a crowd. From opening time until closing time the bench in front of it was occupied, and people were walking around it to view it from all points.

It was called "A Dreamer." Only one figure, a boy, holding in a nerveless grasp a fishing rod. He had long since forgotten all about fish. Something about the rod and the bit of grassy bank on which he was lying made one, too, dream of clear fishing pools and deep green shadows and the lazy hum of insects and the soft, aimless stirring of a scarcely noticed breeze. The relaxation of the boyish figure was wonderful — noticeable even in the toes and fingers. There seemed to be no tense muscles, and yet the proportions, the harmony, the grace of the little figure would arrest the most casual observer.

Something about it seemed to strike a responsive chord in the heart of every passer-by, whether he might be merely an idler or one making a conscientious business of seeing everything and hurrying on.

One was carried back by it to one's own days of childish dreaming — the long, long hopes —

the glories of a future almost within grasp. The boy's face was exceptionally beautiful, but the chief charm lay in the expression — something so subtle it almost seemed to change while one looked.

A lady, evidently an American, stood examining it. There was a curious light in her eyes. It was not the first time she had seen the boy, but it was the first time in its present surroundings. Near her stood a young fellow, also surely an American, and people usually took the liberty as a matter of course of looking at him twice. A certain way of holding himself might have accounted for that, but most people felt an irresistible desire to see his face again — to see what it was that had attracted their attention so suddenly as they passed. "Very handsome" did not seem to say all there was to be said about it.

"John, I had no idea it was so beautiful," said Mrs. Pomeroy finally.

"This will make March's name for her," was the eager answer. "People are wild over it already. Nobody dreams it is the work of a girl of twenty. The committee have said great things about it, and all the papers are taking it up. You ought to have heard what Bouguereau said to

her when he saw it up in the studio. Never saw the old fellow look so upset. I'm so glad Mr. Colfax is coming over. Won't he be delighted? Sit down; there's a place."

Mrs. Pomeroy took the vacant seat and John stood beside her and they looked at the sculpture together.

"I don't suppose March will come near here," continued John. "Perhaps she may for the fun of it. And of course she'll have to look at the other things." Even as he spoke he glanced toward the great arch and saw coming through it a somebody the very sight of whom was refreshing.

March improved every year in appearance until John wondered when it would stop. Her face would have been almost too grave and earnest had it not been for the readiness of her smile, and for the peculiarly bright way in which her face lit up on the slightest provocation. She saw her mother and John and came over toward them. They greeted her silently, rather wondering what she would do. She stood by John and eyed the dreamer very critically. "I should think," she said with some disdain, "he had better go on with his fishing, or go along on that errand his mother

sent him on. I could tell him that dreaming is a very poor business."

An English lady sitting near Mrs. Pomeroy turned and eyed March deliberately with her lorgnette, and then remarked to her companion, in a distinctly audible voice: "These American girls are the most singularly unsoulful, surface beings created! They have no conception of spirit or art! They think the world was made when they were!"

Even Mrs. Pomeroy could not restrain a slight smile. "Some people," went on March imperturbably, "would sit here and feel uplifted by looking at that thing in marble, with its name cut on it, when if they saw a live boy doing just so, they would think he was a lazy good-for-nothing, a half-dressed, indecent little wretch."

The English lady rose, looked over March's head as well as she could, which act was n't very killing, as she was half a head shorter, and walked away with lofty indifference.

John was beaming with joy over the encounter, but he took pains to tell March that he always knew she was mean.

The English lady had occasion to remember March. She had lived for years in Paris and

prided herself on being quite a Parisian. French art she was enthusiastic over. All its oddities and nudities and sentimentalities found an echo in her artistic soul. Later in the day she passed an anatomical model of a running hound — minus its skin — just as March and her party also passed it.

“These French,” said March, “are so given over to the nude that they won’t even leave the skin on a dog.”

The English lady wished fervently that the genus American girl could be wiped off the face of the earth — with especial reference to this latest unsoulful specimen.

John too had had the good fortune to exhibit in the Salon this year. It was his first year, though March had had an exhibit the year before. John said he took far more pleasure in his good success than March did in hers, although of all the Salon visitors very few would not see her Dreamer and probably not a thousandth part of them all would notice his little production. For his pen and ink work hung in the gallery and except on very crowded days people did not seem to care for that gallery, and of the people who patronized it not many cared for pen and ink drawing.

But March was proud of John's work, prouder than he was, and that was saying a great deal. They had been in Paris two winters without returning to the United States. The time had flown on the wings of the wind, but March was intensely anxious to go home.

"Give me America," she would say. "Paris is very fine, but I don't want to be anything but an American. If I am going to be a sculptor, I want first and foremost to be a sculptor, and then if there is any nationality to such things, and I know there is, I want to be an American sculptor. And I want to go home. There is n't any place on earth like our home. I want to see Bess. I could get along here in Paris all my life, but I would rather lose half my life than grow to prefer Paris to the United States. I'm an American."

John was if anything more anxious to get back than March was. He felt on such friendly terms with his pen that he was anxious to try himself. He must buckle down to work, and get on to something. He wanted to begin illustrating, no matter in how small a way. He had had a little good fortune that way already — just enough to fire his enthusiasm. And he did want to see Ted. He had sent for Ted's picture twice during his

absence, and each picture had shown such a frank, honest, good little face that he fairly longed to see him.

Mrs. Pomeroy felt that she had been sufficiently expatriated, and business required her attention, so that she must have returned in any case.

So it came to be an accepted conclusion that in June they should sail for home.

When Mr. Colfax came the good man could hardly contain himself. His pride in March's progress was most sincere. As his enthusiasm rose he recollected more and more of his first meeting March, and it was by this time firmly fixed in his mind that he had perceived her genius at his first interview—that he knew her for a born sculptor when his eyes first rested on her face. March and John had vivid recollections of a different character; but far was it from them to hint anything that could spoil such great satisfaction.

Every day Mr. Colfax hied him to the Salon, and sitting on the seat before March's Dreamer gazed at it diligently before devoting his attention to anything else. He enjoyed hearing what people said about it. He took a childish pleasure in hearing about the "man" who carved it. But

he also saw fit to worry a great deal about March. She saw too many people. Young men were far too plentiful where she was to be found. It irritated him horribly to see March sitting down to look at some picture, and then to see three or four young men bending eagerly to hear what she said. He fumed, and could not enjoy anything, to find that when he had a chance to engage her attention, other men would come up and join the group. Mr. Colfax was even guilty of sulking.

“Mrs. Pomeroy, take March away; shut her up in your hermitage there at Wellsburg. Such genius ought not to be let out loose! Good heavens, how it enrages me! Why can’t those men leave her alone? That La Crosse; suppose he is making a name for himself—miserable Frenchman! There’s Crompton, good New York family and great things expected of him! Don’t be so blind; she is too beautiful. Save such genius for the cause. She will be lost to Art yet!”

He was going on one day in that fashion and John was standing beside Mrs. Pomeroy. His eyes wandered restlessly down the crowded hall. He could see March; beautiful—yes, beautiful beyond all others; and her face was so animated

and her smile so kindly, and her manner so gracious and her whole bearing of such unconscious dignity, that it was no wonder the young artists of her acquaintance — men who were exhibitors like herself and of whom people said brave things — should stand near her and be glad to hear what she said and to show the thoughtful regard for her that they all felt ; for March had an individuality that made itself known and that surely won respect and inspired those near her with a desire to be the best possible.

John felt distinctly miserable. He recalled the day Mr. Colfax first came to Wellsburg and the things he said then, and the way it all made him feel. He felt as depressed now as then, but he was more conscious of the whys and wherefores. He could not bear to look forward. He wished vehemently, in a boyish way, that he could gallop up to March on a winged and fiery steed, seize her, and bear her away with him forever. And then he laughed to himself at the thought of how little good it would do any one to gallop away with March. Why was n't he somebody ? Why was n't he a man ? For John was not one of the crude specimens who believe they are men grown at nineteen or twenty. Why was n't he

wonderful and masterful and black haired and very fierce and very sarcastic and very fetching, and with very deep feelings that showed in his eyes, and very fascinating and compelling like Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, and like other men in books? He could laugh, and he did laugh; but there was a very real ache inside of him; and a very depressed, downcast sort of a feeling which he would live right down, and forget if possible; for nobody but a fool, according to John's code, would go around looking as though he had the dyspepsia, and making other people uncomfortable, when he could keep things to himself.

But things were hard. The life in Paris had gone so swiftly and with such pleasure! He and March had been true to their promises and had watched each other's work and had been honest in their criticisms, and had helped each other even more than their masters had helped them. He had "grown"; he knew that. Hard work, and much reading, and travel, and much meeting of people well worth knowing, and awakened ambitions — all these things had told on him. And in all the time in Paris, wrought into everything was the thought of March. March did this and said that — together they found so and so. And

now once more he seemed to be at the end of everything. This could not go on always. He would not think what might happen next, and how March might slip away out of his life forever. As well be gone entirely, it seemed to him, as not to know her and live with her as he had since he was fifteen.

He was n't going to think about it all the time. He could n't help things. But something about seeing March up there at the end of the hall, surrounded by those men, made him feel desperately lonesome. He did not want to hear Mr. Colfax talk about it, some way. It seemed too brutal. And he walked off by himself.

"What a spendid fellow, Mrs. Pomeroy!" said Mr. Colfax with a sigh. "I never saw such shoulders and such a head. Where did he ever learn to carry himself like that in these degenerate days? Where did he ever get such a physique? If people could raise a few more like that, we could have some sculptors once more. Jove! we could outdo the Greeks!"

The next evening, after a hard day's work officiating as guide to some sight-seeing friends, John stretched himself out on the divan in their sitting room, when March came in.

John started to sit up.

"Stay there ; don't move. I pitied you all day running around with those people;" and going over to the divan March stirred up some pillows, stuck them up in different places to suit herself, moved John's head around and eyed it critically to see if it looked comfortable, gave his hair a pat, and sat herself down in a rocking-chair near by.

John was smiling broadly. "Well, I don't believe you ever before were quite so nice to me as that !"

"Not for lack of inclination, surely ! But I should know your matter-of-fact soul would scorn the amenities of life unless you were pretty tired."

"Is n't that funny?" was the musing answer. Then, after a pause, "I wonder if there is anything in that? Makes me think of when I was little" —

As he stopped there March said, "Go on."

"Why, you see I used to suffer — yes, just literally suffer — when I was little, to have somebody kiss me and pet me. After my mother died — and I don't remember but just one thing about her — my Uncle Monroe took me to his house. He kept a bachelor establishment, and his housekeeper, a

hard old soul, took care of me. She was real good to me, awfully good, but of course she didn't make any fuss over me. There was a little girl lived next door, about my age, and her mother used to come to the door while we were playing, and she would run up to her mother and be kissed and come and play again. And her mother would rock her out on the porch. Why, I got so jealous of her I could hardly live. I would go to bed at night and think about it and cry and cry. But if the little girl's mother had tried to kiss me—which she never did—I should not have liked it; I should have thought she pitied me or something; I wanted somebody my own to think a lot of me."

"Why, you poor little soul! I never thought of such a thing. You seem so sort of fortunate, it would never enter my head but that you must have had all there was to be had."

"Oh, I did, of course. My uncle was very proud of me, and liked to show me off, and would have felt terribly if I had been sick—which I never was; but he did n't answer up to the notion I had of being loving. I suppose I remembered something about my mother then. I know I had a sort of a feeling that I thought was my mother—I don't know that I can explain it—but to tell the

honest truth it never went away. When I felt bad and wanted to be loved, sort of a warm feeling came inside of me, as though I was all hugged up safe to somebody nice after I had been scared. Well, that feeling I grew to think was my mother. It was all I remembered of her, I suppose. Guess I was pretty particular, for people were always saying, 'What a lovely little boy!' and trying to get me to sit on their laps, and all that; but I hated that. I wanted to be loved by somebody all my own, in a nice, private way;" and John laughed.

March said again as he paused, "Go on, John," as she sat looking at him. What music is to some people, looking at beautiful lines and curves and coloring was to March. Why could n't she make a model of John just as he was? The lines she saw seemed to be the perfection of grace. And she could sit there and look and look. "The best face—the best face!" she kept saying to herself.

"Oh, there was n't much about it. I don't suppose I thought about it so much as I make out. One boy I played with — his mother kept a little bakeshop — was a pretty nice boy; and his mother was so fond of him! I don't remember

anything about his father, if he had one. His mother was stout and wore great aprons with flour on them, and she would have nice, spicy, bakery smells about her, and she would look hot when she came from the oven, and she was very good tempered. She used to pat her boy on the face and rumple his hair and turn up his chin with her hands to kiss his mouth, and pick him up in her arms, high up, and hug him for a minute, and set him down. Well, I was just enough of a little fool that I could n't stand it. And I quit playing with him because it always made me feel so forsaken and lonesome to go over there. That's all I remember about that. I guess it's lucky when I was bigger that I did n't fall in with some low-minded person who would have been loving to me, or made me think I was the only person in the world."

"O John!" The baldness of the possibility seemed too awful for a moment.

John smiled, but there was something so very brave about his smile that it almost made the tears spring to March's eyes.

John's hand and arm were hanging off the sofa in a relaxed, nerveless fashion ; and March almost involuntarily leaned forward and took his hand in

both hers. It was a strong, firm, perfectly made hand ; she knew it as some people know faces ; she had modeled from it once ; she held it in her hand and smoothed it with the other again and again. She felt it tremble slightly, and looked at him. There was such an eager, pleading look in his eyes, a slight flush on his face, his lips parted as though to speak, and yet he would not. She knew he was scarcely breathing. She put her face down on his hand. He felt soft lips—a cheek so deliciously soft and warm it was like a dream.

“March, do you love me ?” The voice did not sound like John’s at all.

He felt a long kiss on his hand and a tight squeeze.

“I don’t mean the way you love Bess.”

March looked up with a queer smile.

“Love you? I love you with my whole heart and soul—always have, I guess. You are the best, John, the best ; there never was anybody made so good as you !”

John’s eyes shone, his color came and went. The perfect restfulness and peace that came over him when March said that seemed utterly inexplicable ; it was only to be felt. Just to know

that! The world could go on as it would. Life might bring what it pleased. Nothing could ever take that away from him. It was n't anything to talk about. There was nothing but to know. What his heart had been so hungry for, so insatiably hungry for, was his. It almost seemed as though everything must stop now; there was no reason in anything further. The climax had been reached.

"Did n't you always know I loved you?"

He shook his head. He could n't take his eyes from her face.

"Well, John," very gravely, "my whole heart and every loving thing about me is yours — and I'm glad to have you know it. It will make us feel more satisfied and sure and together, to *know* it. But we will be satisfied with just feeling and knowing it for a long time yet; won't we, John? We must n't spoil this wonderful thing." She leaned forward and kissed him full on the mouth; and he had his arms around her close for one second.

"Yes," he said. "I don't want anything but to know it — now. Seems as though that would kill me almost."

March sat in her rocking-chair looking at John

and John at her for a long time in perfect silence; and then they fell to talking about ordinary things; and they each were glad, so glad in their trust in each other, and in their new sense of nearness!

CHAPTER XIX.

WELLSBURG AGAIN.

THE latter part of June, and the great house at Wellsburg was occupied once more.

There is nothing very euphonious about the sound of the word "Wellsburg," but it was as music to March's ears. Every mile that took her nearer home brought more eager desires to see this and that and the other. Would the Catawba grapevines be in good order? Had the horses lost all their spirit? Would the phaëton and carriages need doing over? How fine it would be to sit out on the veranda once more, and to feel the delicious coolness of the great hall! And how she did wish for one drink of water from that fresh, cold, sparkling, everlasting spring down by the spring house! March could hardly wait.

It seemed almost unfair that they should have to stop for the children. March went over to Morristown for Bess—her big twelve-year-old girl. But if she had expected any marked changes in Bess, she was speedily undeceived. It seemed at first as though the child had not altered a par-

ticle, though on inspection she did seem to have grown a little taller, and she was rather prettier ; and March was gratified to perceive that her hair, which had grown long, had become endowed with quite a bewitching tendency to curl.

John went over to Philadelphia for Ted and to see Dr. Logan. And then they were all together on the way to Wellsburg ; then at the familiar old station, seeing familiar faces ; then driving up the fine old pike ; then in sight of the house — and then *there!*

March had a dim expectation that she was going to be greatly shocked over changes. And changes there were almost none. To be sure, they had not been away quite two years, but that seemed a long, long time.

The house had been opened and aired by the indefatigable Mrs. Dixon, before the home-comers reached there ; but there was still much to be done. Some things required rejuvenating and repairing, and all the odds and ends they had picked up during their foreign sojourn had to be unpacked, arranged, and rearranged.

For a time “sculping,” as Bess called it, and illustrating, and art in all its branches seemed to fall into desuetude. March simply would not do

anything but ride horseback and play tennis and amuse herself in the barn, and lounge — and drink that good spring water. She expressed the most shocking heresies.

“I would rather own this spring than all the pictures and statuary in Paris.” “I would rather be able to go down to the spring and get a drink — yes, out of the ground if you like — than to be able to go into the Louvre every day of my life.”

It was the horseback riding that seemed to retain its charm the longest. Every place of interest had to be revisited. She had to ride before breakfast and after breakfast, before supper and after supper. She could n't get enough of it.

John was about as wild to feel the freedom of a good horseback ride on these fine old roads as March. Everything was pleasant. Mrs. Pomeroy would hear them ride off laughing, and hear them ride back laughing. Life seemed to have resolved itself into a perpetual joke. Bess and Ted were far more businesslike, and engrossed in more serious interests than March and John.

Ted was all wrapped up in the farm. He was at the Dixons', as before, desperately anxious to work up his muscle, and to make his strength an important item to Mr. Dixon.

Bess, to March's amusement and a little bit to her disappointment, had developed a streak, whether of a lasting or merely temporary character remained to be proved, of the most uncompromising domesticity. She loved to sew. She begged March to show her how to cut out some underclothes for herself, which March obediently did, assuring her that she had better think about it, for she need n't do it unless she chose; but that if she started there should be no flinching: she must then make them and make them well. But Bess took no time for thinking; she was determined to make her own clothes. "And then," she said to March, "I shall learn to be a most splendid sewer, and I will make all your clothes, the loveliest ways; for you might turn out poor with your sculping — accidents will happen. Anyway, sculptors can't spend time sewing, and I'll look after all such things for you; that's why I want to hurry and learn. And I'll earn money and buy a pants pattern and make some pants for Mr. John. He might turn out poor too."

"How about Ted? why not make Ted's?"

"Oh, *he's* going to be a rich man! He says so. He is going to be a lawyer, and make heaps of money. Lawyers are awful rich, Ted says."

"What are you going to do to earn money?"

"Well, I'll earn it some way."

"How?"

"Oh, I'll be a clerk."

"Clerks don't make any money — they get little, mean wages."

"Then I won't be a clerk. I'll keep a school."

"You don't study hard enough. I don't believe you could ever keep a school."

"I'm glad of it. I'll be a dressmaker."

"Dressmakers don't often make much money, and they have to work awfully hard."

"Then I don't want to be a dressmaker. I'll be President of the United States."

"That would be very fine. What will you do when you are President?"

"I'll call my congressmen together and have a talk about sewers. Around Morristown sewers are always getting out of order. And we'll see about having the streets cleaned in New York."

"What will you do about foreign countries and a cabinet and such things?"

"I'll get married, and make my husband Vice-President, and have him tend to those things."

"Anything else you would do if you were President?"

“Yes ; I’d have the White House painted some other color, and every day I’d go down into the kitchen and make ice cream and custard pie.”

March felt positive that her infant never was going to distinguish herself. But Bess had grown to be quite companionable, and unless she got to talking about something she did not know anything about, March found that it was quite pleasant to have the little girl with her. Bess did not care about learning anything, and she was as well satisfied as ever with her own opinion on all subjects ; still she was bright and could be interested, and about some things she had an extraordinary amount of good sense for her age.

When John went to see Dr. Logan the great question was, “What about Ted?”

The doctor expressed it as his opinion that Ted should now go to a classical school and fit for college. Ted was going to want a good education.

“But he is not going to be a scholar in an advanced sense of that word. He will go into active life of some kind. He thinks now he wants to be a lawyer, and I should not be surprised if he might in the end be one. He has a good mind, a desire for knowledge, provided he can use it. He does n’t care at all just for the

knowing things. He has a somewhat combative, argumentative disposition, and a very great interest in life, in people, in things, and certainly a great love of justice. Whether that last would be of any service to him in the legal profession or not is a question," with a laugh. "He is such a remarkably good boy, so honorable and conscientious, such a thorough little Christian, that I have found myself hoping he might some day turn to the ministry. But of course it is absurd to want all good men in one profession when we are so sorely in need of them in other walks in life."

John had a talk with Ted one day when they were driving up from down town. Ted had been talking, and in every sentence showing such an active mind and such a carefully considered fund of information, gathered from his reading, that John felt very proud of him.

"Ted, do you want to go to college?"

The blood rushed into Ted's face. For a moment he did n't say anything; then, looking at John squarely, he said: "I do — like everything — and I hate to say so, because you'll think that means the same as saying, Won't you send me? and — and — it makes me ashamed."

"O Ted! Ted! my little brother Ted! How

can you be so mean!" was the reproachful answer.

"Oh, I know how you feel," said Ted eagerly, "because you're so good and so — oh, I don't know what — and all that ; but — me — for me — I've no business to be getting so much. I do want to go to college. I've just got to go. I know I'm going ; but can't I earn my own money ? Don't lots of fellows do that ?"

"Oh, misery !" ejaculated John ; "hear him ! Now see here, Ted ; listen. I suppose lots of fellows do earn their way through college. It has been preached to me all my life how astonishing they are and how much better they turn out, and all that. Don't you believe a word of it. If they have to, they have to, and they are to be honored for it, and it is pleasant to know they get on afterward. But you believe me ; other things being equal, they would have got along much better if they could have had all their time for learning the things a college course is supposed to teach, instead of bothering about filthy lucre. Of course there are fellows who go to college with lots of money, and either have no brains or not much inclination to use them, and they make a mess of themselves they could n't have made if they had

been poor. But that is neither here nor there. You would n't be either a fool or a villain. Why, these fellows with no money either have to borrow, and go swamped with debt, or they have to dress so that they feel uncomfortable and don't get a chance to get polished up any — and a man needs a deal of polishing these days. They can't go to lectures and all the things that cost money and have a real value to a student, and they can't get enough books, nor have time to do outside work and reading. Why, Ted, it's crazy on the face of it! You might as well say that if a man started to walk from here to New York on only one leg, he would turn out a better walker and get along better than a man who had two legs. Of course some men who have two legs might stop at the first town they came to and stay there, and the one-legged man, if he kept on, would win. But that's not a fair case.

“Now about me and the money. What money it will take to give you the best education to be had and to set you up in whatever you choose is yours; that's all there is to it; it's yours. Money came to me the same way. I did n't make a great to-do about it, and say I never could use it! I mean to get all the good out of it I can.

And, Ted, you had better follow my example. Just emulate your six-foot brother, John Holland, your athletic brother. Think what a swimmer I am, Ted! what a rider—what an athlete, what a—oh, lots of things of course, and then do me the discredit to say my ways are n't good enough to suit you! Now, Ted, joking aside, seriously, be my boy. You don't know how I love you, and how proud I am of you, and will be of you. Can't we help each other, and be proud of each other, and let these miserable money questions go to Guinea?"

Ted had long been in a state bordering on dissolution. Every word John ever said was a rule of life to him. And now—well, why not let the whole matter go? John knew, John was so great and away above him. And hardly knowing what he was doing, he pulled himself together, and, looking up into John's face with the most loving, trusting smile, said simply, "I want to do just what you say, always."

While March had seemed to spend most of her time riding and driving and "fooling," as she called it, she had been, with the help of her mother and John, making some arrangements for work. First, as she insisted that she meant to stay right

there in Wellsburg several months in the year, she began the building of a studio. She planned it herself, and it certainly was a very unique little building. Her light came just as she wanted it. It was furnished with every convenience for her work, and was of so pleasing a design that it was quite an ornament to the grounds. The shop was to hold its old place in her affections, she claimed; but the studio was for real work.

As soon as they were fairly settled for the summer, March and Mrs. Pomeroy had turned a room, formerly the sewing room, opposite the library, into a studio for John. When he had hung it with sketches and illustrations, and bits of work done by friends of his, and all sorts of artistic traps he had picked up abroad, they were all very proud of it. He received an order for an illustration, and while working at that he realized that again he must be making his plans. He couldn't stay there in Wellsburg. He must be going back to New York. Very likely March would not go to the city until after Christmas. She had said so far that she only meant to spend January, February, and March in New York. And while he worked the old lonesome feeling came back. How blank it would seem in New

York! How easy it seemed to be for March to make up her mind as to what she meant to do, and then to go ahead and do it! And he—he was always thinking of half a dozen variations of the same thing, and wanting something, he scarcely knew what. Why should n't he feel as satisfied and contented as he did last week—last month—ever since that wonderful evening in Paris when March said she truly loved him? Perhaps he had been a great fool to think she meant anything by that. He supposed she told what was so, of course, and she did love him; but not the way he meant, not the way he wanted—a love for him alone. And his spirits went down and down. No, of course not. He was only a boy. March could n't care for him that way. And he would go to New York, and March would go to New York; and Calhoun and Crompton and Masters and Popenoe and Alger, and all those men—all of them brilliant, talented men—would be around her all the time; and he could feel with a sort of prescience the bitter, hopeless, utterly despairing lonesomeness that would come over him. How could he endure it after those weeks of buoyant happiness!

He rose early the next morning and went out

to look at the studio. He half expected to find March out there. And he saw her sitting on a block of gray granite. He thought he knew just what her face would look like when she turned it to him—alert, glad to see him, glad she was alive, but all taken up for the time in some new plan for the studio.

She did not hear him, and he had a full look at her face before she saw him. He thought he had never seen it so lovely; she looked a little sad, almost as though she too knew what it felt like to be lonesome—but of course he could n't believe that.

She saw him and smiled at once—a very loving smile it seemed to him.

“Sit down, John! Is n't it a perfect morning?”

He sat down near her, and he thought of so many things—remembered how he had thought it would be quite enough to know she loved him. “But one can't know it forever because he is told once—at least I can't. Perhaps she did n't mean what I thought she meant then, and perhaps she feels differently now, anyway. I expect she would just hate to have me touch her!” But that was too much; he could n't bear to think that even for an instant.

"March," he said in a slow, hesitating way, "you won't mind, will you? but I can't stand it any longer—that is, if I don't have to. When you said you—loved me—did you mean the kind of loving that would agree with—with your marrying somebody else? Now don't blame me!"

"Why, John Holland!"

And John could have sworn that March's eyes were full of tears.

"Did you mean," went on John, his heart thumping until he thought it would break, "that you loved me so that some day you would marry me—so that we could always be together, and live together, and love each other truly?"

March was looking straight at him—her head on her hand as she leaned forward to look at him, and her eyes still seemed surely to have tears in them, but she did not say a word.

"I know I'm not wonderful, March, and I'm not even a man yet, I suppose; but I can't bear to think of the lonesome, lonesome feelings—oh, the awfully lonesome heart in me if I've made a mistake. I'd be so good, March," after a pause, "clear through me I'd be good. I would anyway, now, I'm sure," earnestly; "but I know how you feel, and I would be good."

March smiled a little.

"You mean that—that some day you will—marry—me?"

"You or nobody."

"And can't we speak about it? Won't we tell your mother? I thought it was enough in Paris just to know you loved me—and it is n't at all. There are things twice as sweet. Won't it be surer and better if we can speak about it, and know it, and be loving to each other now? Why, March, it's the most wonderful thing there is! If we are true and right, we can't spoil it—we can only make it better and dearer and fuller. Don't you know it's so, March?"

"Yes. I have thought the same thing. We can be the best to each other—that we can be. It won't be any too good, I'm sure."

And John wondered how the something that thinks and feels inside of one could act so differently in half an hour—how it could make one feel so desolate, and then, without any real external change, give one a happiness that seemed beyond all reason.

March was sure that they would talk it all over with her mother the very first thing; but there never seemed to be such a hard thing to do. Her

mother never seemed so busy. Molly wanted her and Mary Ann wanted her ; an important letter had to be written ; and then when at last she sat down in peace on the veranda, March herself was needed by the workmen. Then it was dinner time, and after dinner up drove Nellie Starr and her little brother.

Nellie had grown fine looking. Her walk and figure were better ; she looked stronger ; she was better dressed ; she had a more independent and less self-conscious air. March had seen her several times, but had not had a good talk with her. They all sat on the veranda, and Nellie was plied with questions. The flower experiment had turned out admirably.

“It has done wonders for mother, she is so cheerful and hopeful, and she loves flowers ; and working outdoors in the ground has made a new woman of her. And I, why, I’m twice as strong. Those things would have paid in themselves. But we are making money really ; just enough to keep our minds easy and to make sure of a good education for Paul. Business is growing too. You see, we were very careful about investing anything. We have a man, Seth Piper, to work for us — and our glass frames have n’t been many. We

keep flowers all the year around. Violets are splendid sellers, just as you said, March ; do you remember ? They are our stand-bys from November till April. We do well with roses too, in summer, but not so well. Sweet peas are great sellers —and English daisies. We have made a good thing on those. When you come down I can show you everything and tell you just what we do. March, you have been the making of me : but I always have felt as though John Holland had been my guardian angel."

But by evening the time seemed to have come for talking. Bess had gone to bed. Mrs. Pome-roy and March and John were all out on the veranda as in the old days. And still March could not think of anything to say. If she had known what her mother was thinking, she would have found it quite an easy matter. Mrs. Pome-roy was thinking, as she sat there, what a splendid fellow John was—what a man he would be one of these days. She remembered the first night he came, and her brother's worries. She remembered all the lovable things about him as a boy, the sterling truth and uprightness of him now. "The boy is all heart," she used to say to herself. And March. She thought of March, and

was troubled. She hardly knew why. But she vaguely wished that March could realize as she did what manner of man this John Holland would be. But of course she could n't. She had seen too much of him, and March did not know everything.

As if to prove to her mother that she knew more than she was given credit for, March said without the slightest warning, "Mamma, would you think it strange or foolish if John and I should want to get married some time?"

Mrs. Pomeroy thought for a moment that she had imagined those words — only they did sound so peculiarly like March.

"Are you thunderstruck, mamma?" asked March affably. Her ease had returned now that she had spoken.

"I always said March was sort of mean, Aunt Pomeroy," said John regretfully. "Now I could have put that twice as persuasively."

"I believe you could, dear," laughed Mrs. Pomeroy. "Why, March, to answer your question, I might think it strange, but I never could think it foolish."

"There, March! you never will be so smart as your mother when it comes to saying a nice

thing ;" and John promptly seated himself by Mrs. Pomeroy, where he could look into her face, and insisted on her telling him that he was the best boy she knew, and just as nice as March, and the delight of her heart.

"And now, March," he said, turning around, "now that we can have a little peace and satisfaction, we will work, won't we ! I mean to be the first illustrator in this country ; and if you don't sculp yourself into fame, it will be because you are a base deserter and don't care to, for it's in you."

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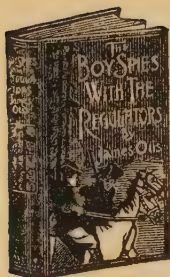
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